Commentary

Volume Fifty-four, Number Four, October 1972

Getting Out of Russia
LEV NAVROZOV

The Quota Commission
ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Why Some Children Don't Speak
SONYA RUDIKOFF

Updike, Malamud & the Fire This Time
ROBERT ALTER

Reykjavik vs. Miami
JACK RICHARDSON

Intellectuals at War
NORMAN PODHORETZ

An Exchange on Ethnicity
MICHAEL NOVAK, ANDREW M. GREELEY, and others

Books in Review
Diane Ravitch / Erich Isaac
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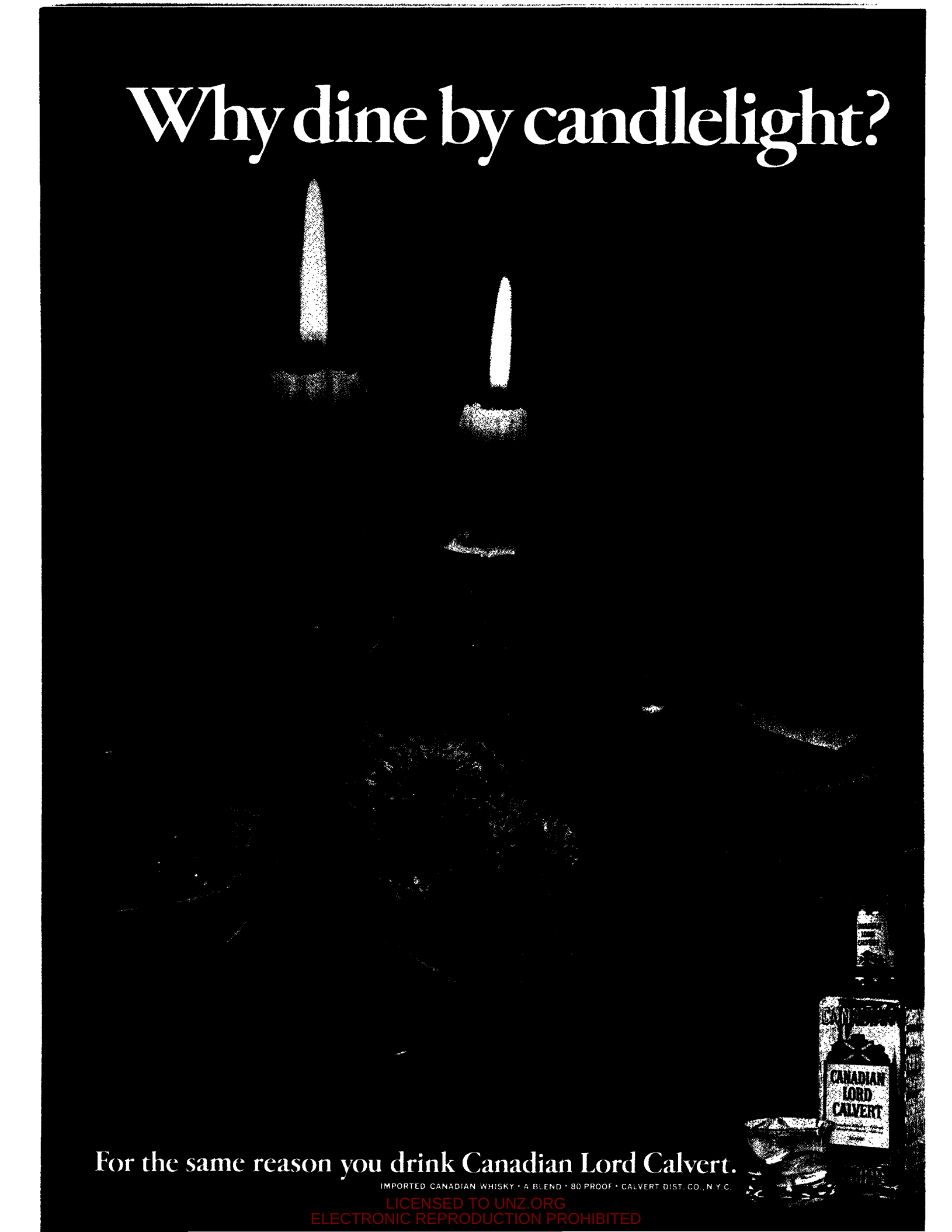

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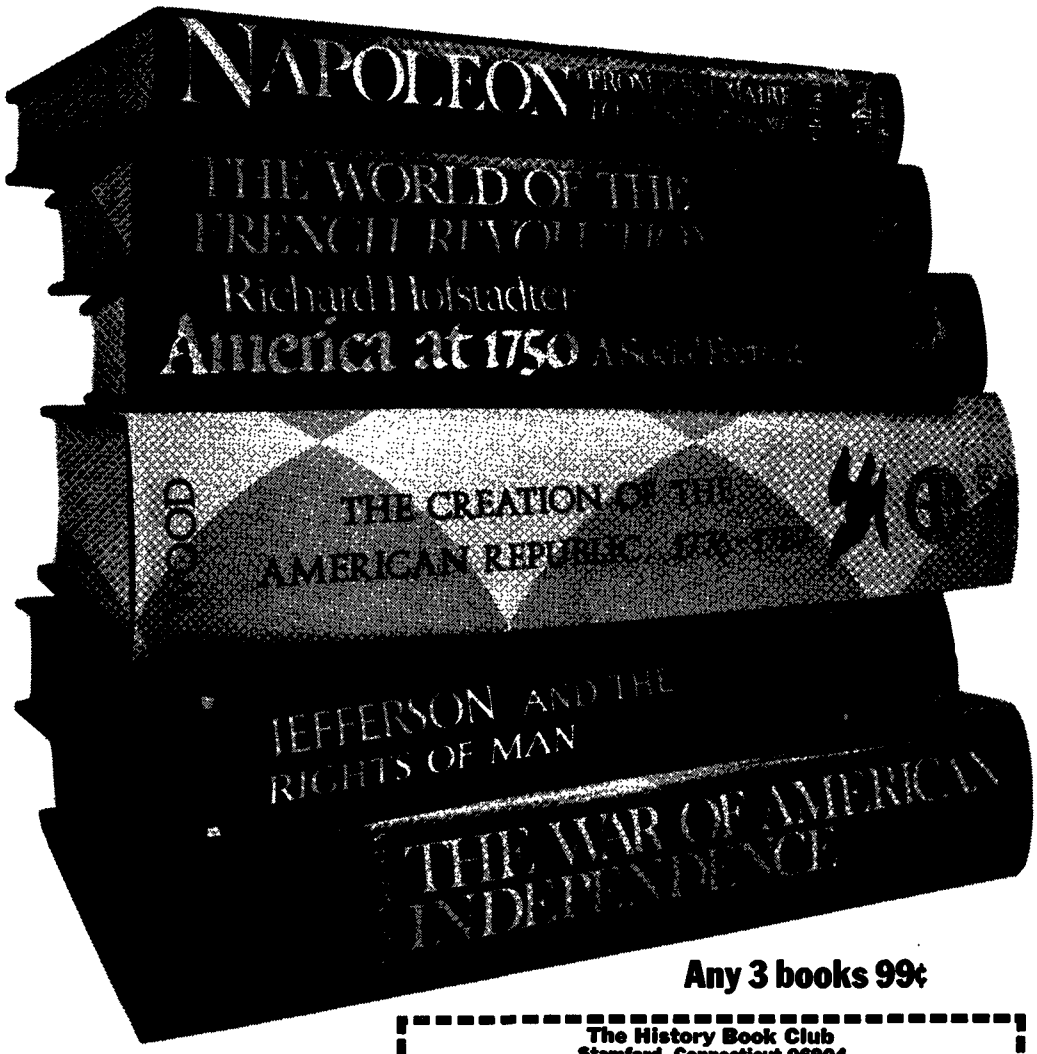
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Commentary

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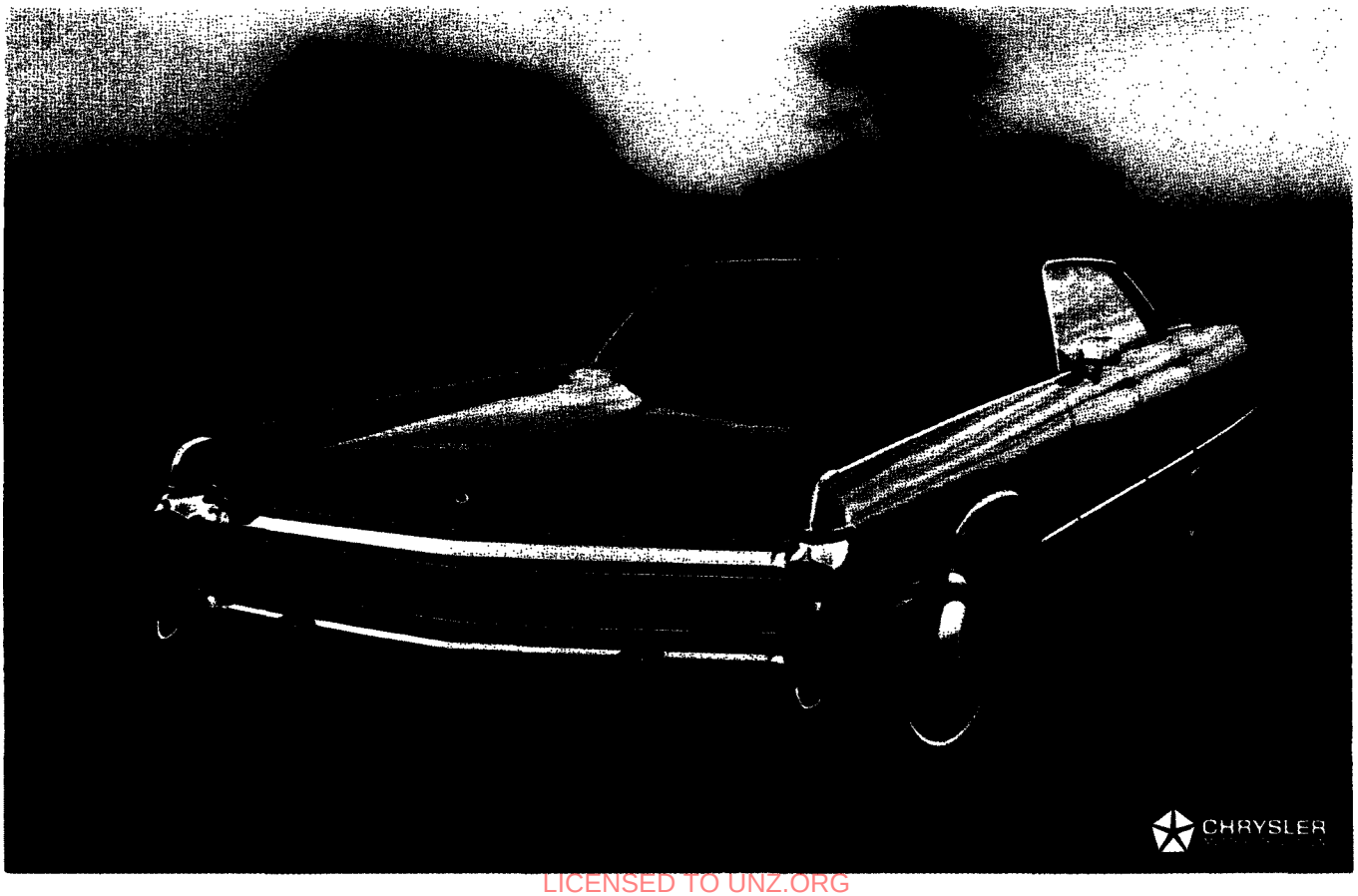

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Intellectuals at War

Norman Podhoretz

Just before reading Hilton Kramer's essay on the avant-garde (p. 37), I also happened to read the symposium on "Art, Culture and Conservatism" in the Summer 1972 issue of *Partisan Review*. Mr. Kramer himself makes a passing reference to this symposium, citing it as a perfect example of how persistent is the myth that the avant-garde remains an underdog in our culture struggling "against impossible odds with little hope of just recognition." Certainly it is true that the organizers of the symposium and some of the contributors are still caught up in this myth. What struck me more forcibly, however, was how many other contributors recognize that the actual situation is exactly the opposite of what the editors of *Partisan Review* say it is in their introductory statement.

"There is," this statement declares, "a growing conservatism in discussions of what's happening in the arts. . . .A querulous tone is becoming increasingly apparent in the assessments of the tendencies and experiments of the past decade. . . .There is a marked suspicion of any deviation from the accepted notions of seriousness, as there is of any departure from the orthodox version of the mainstream." To which Robert Brustein responds by pointing out that the picture evoked by these phrases bears no relation to the realities of the 60's and 70's: "Today, we have a public supine before every cultural novelty, and an army of intellectual critics laboring on behalf of 'innovation' side by side with television commentators and the cultural reviewers for the newspapers and mass magazines." Harold Rosenberg adds: "Today's aesthetic vanguardism is being sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, by state arts councils, by museums, by industrial and banking associations. Foundation grants are made to underground films and magazines, to little review contributors, to happenings and electronic music, to the Merce Cunningham dance group." And several other contributors, including Norman Birnbaum, Clement Greenberg, Christopher Lasch, John Henry Raleigh, and Andrew Sarris also register an awareness that the problem is no longer resistance to the new and the experimental. On the contrary, as all of them recognize, for some time now the problem has been too easy an acceptance of novelty or (as is more likely to be the case, given the low level of education in these matters to which Rosenberg points) senseless repetition that ignorantly takes itself and is ignorantly taken for novelty.

Indeed, so at variance with reality is the symposium's introductory statement that Mary McCarthy, writing from Paris where, by her giggly little account, the literary world makes Brustein's supine American public seem exquisitely discriminating in comparison, confesses that she doesn't know what the editors of *Partisan Review* are talking about. "Who," she asks, "are these dissident and younger talents whose failures are being reveled in?" But no answer to that question emerges from any of those contributions to the symposium which agree with the introductory statement about our cultural situation. Richard Poirier, for example, refuses to make a list of writers or novelists, claiming that the "imaginative energies" of the period are "going not into literature at all but into other things." Yet the only non-writers he mentions are such young and

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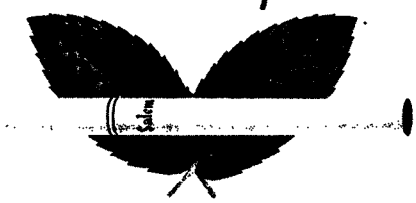

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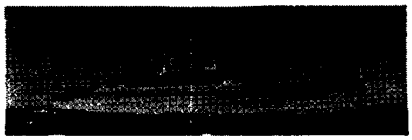

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unappreciated dissidents as Bob Dylan, Truffaut, and Godard.*

WHAT then *are* the editors of *Partisan Review* and those who agree with them talking about when they speak of a new cultural conservatism? Primarily they seem to have in mind the recent work of several writers who have in the past defended avant-garde art and high culture in general. Saul Bellow, Philip Rahv, Robert Brustein, Hilton Kramer, and my own are the names most frequently mentioned as the villains of the piece; and to this list might be added Irving Howe, Lionel Abel, John W. Aldridge, George P. Elliott, and one or two more. Now far from constituting a unified movement, the people grouped together here are mostly at odds with each other on a great variety of literary, political, and even personal grounds. In fact, the only thing they have in common is a highly critical attitude toward the "new sensibility" and the counter-culture. Three or four contributors to the *Partisan Review* symposium characterize this attitude as a "backlash" against the "excesses" of the new sensibility and the counter-culture, as though the objection to these phenomena were only that they have gone too far. The real objection, however, is not that they have gone too far, but that they have either gone nowhere at all or, in John Henry Raleigh's words, that "wrong riders [have ridden] wrong horses through the wrong fork of the road." And this harsh judgment of the new sensibility and the counter-culture has included in its contemptuous sweep critics who have elected for one reason or another to play the part of apologists for tendencies which, knowing better, they might have been expected to expose as meretricious and destructive.

What the *Partisan Review* symposium seems to represent is an effort by some of these apologists to fight back by casting the critics of the new sensibility and the counter-culture in the role of the old bourgeois antagonists of an embattled avant-garde. This is so absurd a scenario that only such wildly imaginative apologists as Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sontag might have lent it a touch of plausibility. But they are absent here, and the lesser talents on whom the editors are forced to rely simply do not measure up to the job. And to make matters worse for the cause of the apologists, *Partisan Review* —thanks largely, no doubt, to the fairmindedness of its chief editor— invited contributions from a good many writers who disagree with the assumptions behind the introductory statement and for whom the sad collection of apologists assembled here is no intellectual match.

BUT there is also a political reason for the failure of the symposium to generate a united front of opposition against the critics of the new sensibility and the counter-culture. "Conservatism does not always take the same form in culture as in politics," the introductory statement informs us. Nevertheless, it goes on to assert, "there does seem today to be some correspondence between the political and cultural drifts to the Right," for "usually the people and the publications that feel threatened by radical politics also feel at home with more familiar art, and with the culture of the past. . . ." With this suggestion that anyone who resists the new sensibility and the counter-culture is probably a conservative in his political ideas as well, the authors of the statement instantly forfeit the support of several contributors who might otherwise be in sympathy with the ulterior purposes of the symposium.

Thus Christopher Lasch re-

* Since Poirier singles me out as one of the literary people he expects to be shocked by the daringly original thought that a culture can be vital even when the literature it produces is uninteresting, I think it may not be altogether improper for me to note that I myself proposed about ten years ago, in justifying my preoccupation as a literary critic with television, movies, and works of "non-fiction" which were then generally considered uncreative, that we might be "looking in the wrong place for the achievements of the creative literary imagination when we look for them only where they were last seen—in novels and poems and plays" (*Doings and Undoings*, p. 8).

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proaches the editors for making "no distinctions among critics of recent cultural fashions" and insists that there is no necessary correlation between political and cultural conservatism. As a political radical who has himself been critical of the counter-culture and the new sensibility, Lasch of course resents being called a conservative on that account. But what mainly bothers him is not that the editors of *Partisan Review* have assimilated cultural to political conservatism; it is, rather, that they have helped to further what he considers a "confusion" between political and cultural radicalism.

Now if the new sensibility and the counter-culture belonged to the history of art, distinguishing them from the New Left would not only be possible, it would be necessary. Aesthetics and politics are indeed "separate realms of existence," as Norman Birnbaum (who is evidently with Lasch in this particular argument) begins his contribution by reminding us. But the trouble from the Lasch-Birnbaum point of view is that the new sensibility and the counter-culture do not belong to the history of art. They belong to the history of publicity and beyond that to the history of politics and more specifically to the history of radical politics. As such they have always exerted their claim to sympathetic attention less on aesthetic than on political grounds, celebrating themselves and being celebrated as weapons in the revolution against American society and not as the matrix of vital and lasting works of art. It is true that a few devotees of the New Left have refused to join in the celebration, correctly seeing in the new sensibility and the counter-culture a nihilistic assault—in the spirit of Dada and other aesthetically minor tendencies in the history of the avant-garde—on all standards and values and even on art itself. The fact remains, however, that the radicalism of the New Left cannot be dissociated from the radicalism of the new sensibility or the radicalism of the counter-culture. They are all part of a single movement ("The Movement," as it has generally styled itself in clear avowal of its own undifferentiated character), expressing a single impulse and tending toward a single overriding goal.

UNTIL recently the American literary world permitted itself to be spiritually terrorized by this movement in both its political and cultural modalities, but in the past year or so the tide has begun to turn. In this sense the editors of *Partisan Review* are right in detecting a change in the atmosphere. Whether they are also right in describing the change as a resurgence of conservatism is another matter. I for one believe that language like this, deriving as it does from the idea of a perpetual war between artists and intellectuals on the one side and middle-class society on the other, stands in the way of what might be called a peacetime conception of the proper relation between the two parties. That we are in need of such a conception is obvious from the *Partisan Review* symposium itself. But it is equally obvious that we are unlikely to develop it until the myth of the avant-garde, from which that symposium takes its obsolescent bearings, is subjected to the kind of criticism Hilton Kramer calls for and that he himself writes. ■

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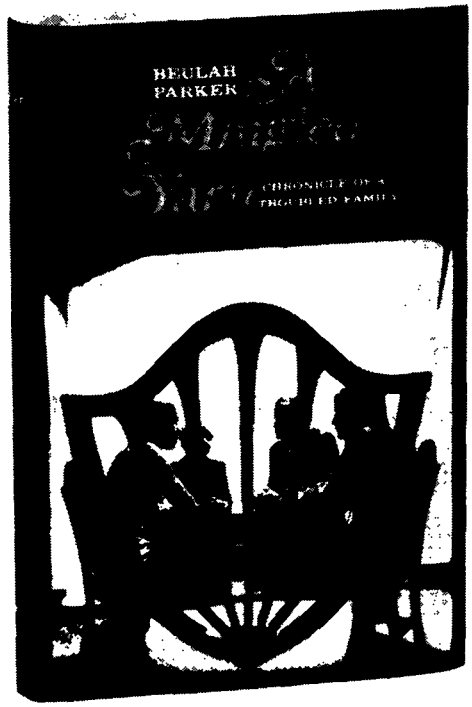

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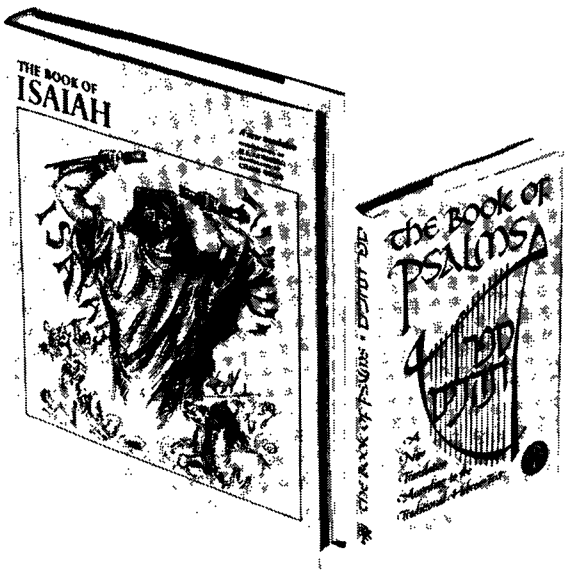

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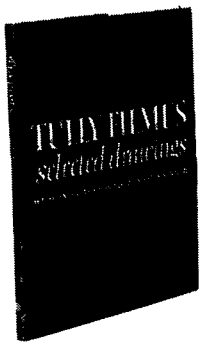

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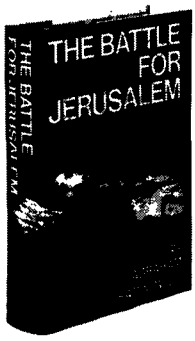

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Letters from Readers

Ethnicity

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert Alter's article on my book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* ["A Fever of Ethnicity," June], is sensitive and intelligent. On a number of matters, he moves me to make explicit what my book left implicit; on others, to clarify; on one or two, to change my mind; and on at least one major issue, to deepen the disagreement, but also the bond of respect, between us. It is on that same major issue—the conception of modernity—that I am less than satisfied with the parallel comments of Norman Podhoretz ["The Idea of a Common Culture," June].

The notion of cultural pluralism is the most intractable of the entire American experiment. Regrettably so, since our experiment is on behalf of all mankind: the whole planet will one day be seeking a system of cultural pluralism. How can we humans, many, be one? *How?* What is the model? What are the methods? Even a good metaphor is lacking. Melting pot? Mosaic? Rainbow? The dangers of divisiveness on the one side and of homogenization on the other are equally depressing. It is my view that in America, at least, it is homogenization that is now more ominous.

That divisiveness is the greater menace is, of course, part of the conventional wisdom. Fears about divisiveness were recently most aroused by students who shouted, trashed, and bombed, and by black militants. "Bring us together," the little girl in Ohio told President Nixon. But the nationalizing forces implicit in American corporations were already doing just that: forcing blacks to greater self-awareness and some students to rebellion against excessive rationalization ("All power to the imagination!"). The situation of blacks, say, in 1968, was no more "divisive" than at any earlier time, only more inexcusable in a national, now no longer regional, civilization. And radical students in 1968 were themselves aware that "corporate liberalism" and "the system" were rather more homogenizing, less liberating, than met the eye. My assessment of the relative dangers of homogenization and divisiveness may be in error; but it is not, upon reflection, implausible.

In this connection, I would like to draw attention to a section of my book which reviewers (has ever a book received such various, energetic reviews?) have nearly all overlooked. I draw a distinction between "Wasp culture" and "superculture," which many have elided, against my intention, into "Wasp superculture." The rationalizing, technological, "advanced" culture which establishes so many of the present conditions of contemporary life is as hostile to some traditional British-American values as it is to those of other ethnic groups. Many British-Americans (a term I now prefer to Wasps) are as upset about the new pressures of superculture as others are. One need only think—randomly—of George Wallace's followers sending "them" (a foreign culture) a message; or of Richard Nixon picturing himself for small-town Republicans of Middle America as "anti-Establishment"; or of Dr. Spock and William Sloan Coffin deriding "the system."

Another way of highlighting this distinction is to point out the various trajectories along which people are moving when they speak of "modernity." Mr. Alter, for example: ". . . for if Jews in some respects have remained exemplary traditionalists, they have also been the modernists *par excellence*." Like Mr. Podhoretz, Mr. Alter draws attention to "individual autonomy" and "personal authenticity" as precious and valuable "key concepts of modern culture in general." These are not, both he and Mr. Podhoretz wish to emphasize (I heartily concur), "Wasp concepts, limited to the assumptions of Wasp ethnicity." They are indeed part of "the idea of a common culture" in which all of us are free to share.

But the personal (and social) trajectories along which each of us moves brings us to these "common ideas" with divergent—and ultimately complementary—associations, images, experiences, emphases. If I may be so bold as to be overly simple for purposes of illustration: Various philosophical traditions, rooted in various "life-forms" (Wittgenstein), approach these common ideas from different

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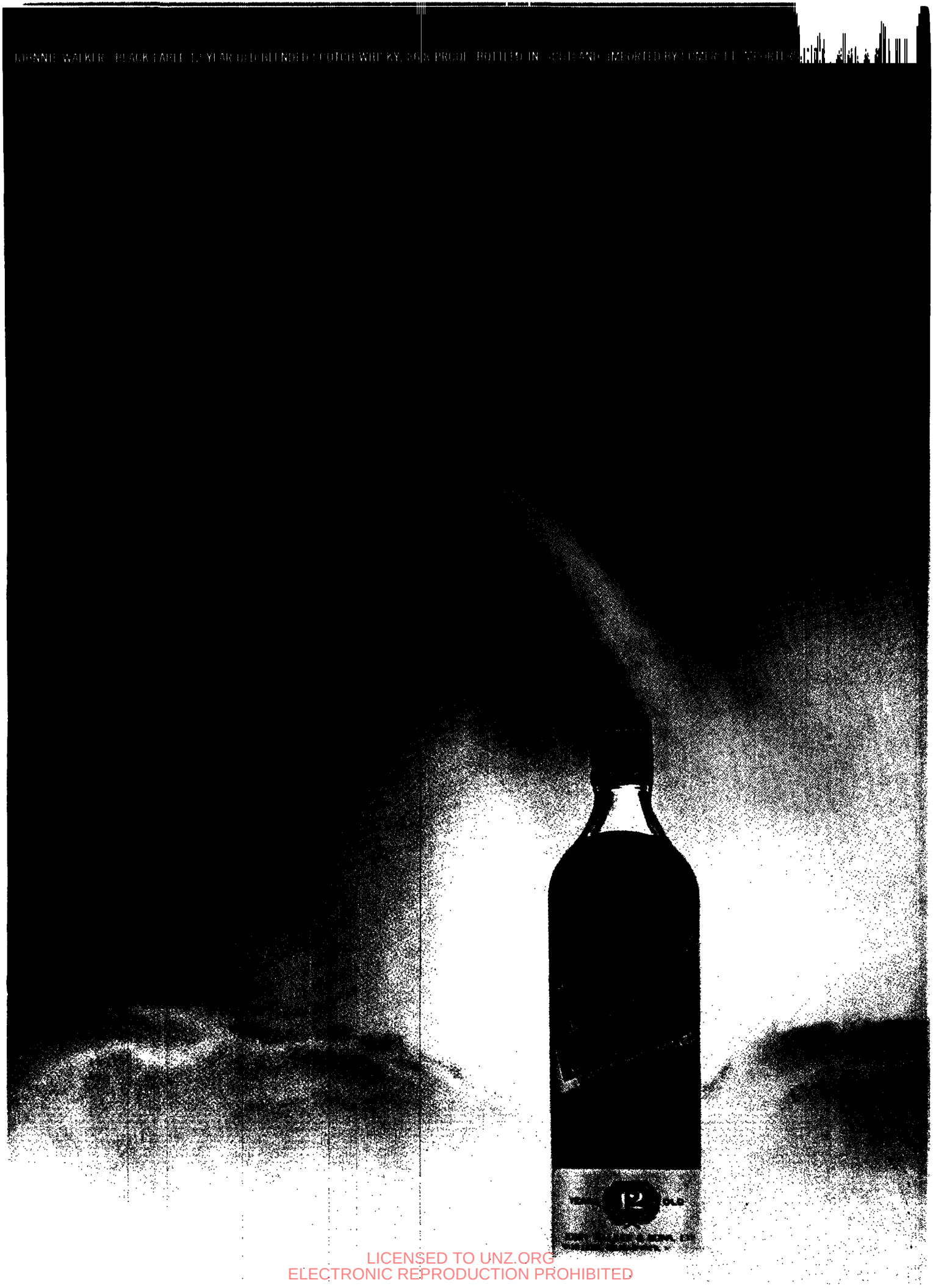

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directions and to different effect. Kant was the first to give classic expression to the ideal of autonomy. But English political traditions were already working out political and social ways of expressing such an ideal, grounding it thereby in practices, traditions, and sentiments not available in the same form on the Continent. The cluster of images in whose context John Stuart Mill writes of the individual and his rights is a network of experiences and symbols demonstrably different from those in the texts of Kant.

Similarly, so far as I can discover, "authenticity" is a concept given infinitely more extensive development in certain Continental writers than in classical or contemporary English writers. Nietzsche is not alone in detecting the great contrasts between Continental and English philosophy. There is, if I may put it this way, a pronounced attention to "interiority" in Continental writers, as contrasted with the more homogeneous, calmer, complacent focus on the stable world (even somehow "external" world) of Oxford and Cambridge philosophy. One can, of course, point to Newman on the "Illative Sense," Coleridge's treatises on imagination and poesy, to novelists like D. H. Lawrence, and to a series of literary critics, and indeed to recent connections between the analysis of ordinary language and phenomenology. But the sense of reality, the stories thinkers sense themselves to be living out, and the symbolic materials in which they live and move, seem significantly different as between Great Britain and the Continent.

Let me take the argument a step further. It is generally conceded, I believe, that Jewish writers in the United States have greatly expanded "the common idea of culture" in America, not least by imparting into American thought some of that powerful Continental concern for—if I may use a term of my own—"intelligent subjectivity": for conceptions like authenticity; ambiguity; psychoanalytic views of the complexity of the self; an analysis of culture and society that illumines the dark and indirect ways of power, privilege, and social position. These represent, at least, the gifts from Jewish thinkers for which, in examining what I have learned and from whom, I am most grateful.

So I do not hold, as Messrs. Alter and Podhoretz fear I may, "that

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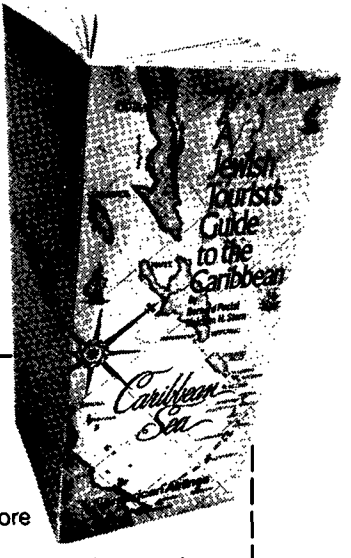

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for a non-Wasp in America, entry into the common culture amounts to nothing more than the trading of one ethnic heritage for another" (Podhoretz). For Jews this has not been true; nor need it be for "the ethnics." Nor do I mean to imply "that the only choice we are offered is to remain in an ethnic community or to become facsimile Wasps" (Podhoretz).

Several times in my book I note that I do not live in an ethnic neighborhood; that I belong to no Slovak associations; and that I bring myself to say "we"—so as to include myself in an ethnic community in some territorial or organizational sense—only with difficulty and with the most extenuated plausibility. What I define as ethnic belonging is "sharing in a historical memory." One can become a professional, move into "the common culture" (and even, God forgive us, into superculture), and still be cognizant of coming to that common culture from a historically unique starting point, along a different trajectory. I am neither British-American nor Jewish, but Slovak. Thus, even in entering into "the common culture," which since a very early age has quickened my heart with desire, I bring to it something unique.

I believe that Mr. Alter is right for chiding me that I do not stress sufficiently "that ethnicity can also be a constricting context for identity." I do not quite accept his aphorism counter to one of mine: "People preoccupied with their own identity are not wholly free." For I can imagine some persons, estimating their inner resources and their finitude, exercising the whole of their freedom upon the task of becoming more fully what they already are. I have encountered beautiful lives of just that sort. Elie Wiesel eloquently describes such an option. That is *one* choice, and I would like to encourage those who make it freely.

But I do agree with Mr. Alter's point. For many of us in the modern period, the implicit story of our lives is a wandering from home, an exploration into the unknown, the seeking of an identity not yet known, not yet invented. Along this way, many perish. Many others indulge in the most fraudulent of postures. But many, too, make of their lives a larger and more beautiful realization of possibilities than could ever have been imagined "back home" or, perhaps, even win sympathy from those who remained there.

So I should have stressed explicitly, not merely implicitly, the three prevalent coercions of American life: the constriction of the small rural town or strongly ethnic neighborhood, both of which sometimes suffocate the soul in the act of bestowing "love" upon it; the constriction of the larger ethnic or religious community, which sometimes demands adherence to a finite life-form not *as* a finite life-form, but as though it were some absolute form descended like blocks of brilliant ice from heaven; and, finally, the constriction of "modernity," in a peculiar sense which now requires definition.

Besides the "modernity" to which Messrs. Alter and Podhoretz properly incline our respect and gratitude, there is another form far more common in its manifestations and powerful in its coercion. I mean the modernity of automobiles, television shows, assembly lines, solicitors and hucksters, and preachers of "enlightenment." This modernity also includes a great many (not all) of its own critics. For one pretense of Modernity II (if I may so designate it) is that its members are enlightened, think for themselves, keep up with things, seek questions but not answers, fearlessly attack idols, bravely blaze the trails of the future. Modernity II corrupts even the most precious ideals of Modernity I: ideals like autonomy and authenticity, for example.

In place of a genuine autonomy, hard won after long years of slow and wise effort, Modernity II offers the clichés and poses of autonomy. Every "enlightened" person claims to be autonomous; yet how are we to explain the widespread pursuit of the fashionable among us? Even in a long life, one meets few really autonomous persons.

In place of a genuine authenticity (it is symptomatic of our times that such redundancy is necessary), Modernity II offers masks, mannerisms, disguised aggressions, complacencies, and most outrageous, fraudulence. So grievous is our lot that the very claim "frankly" or "candidly" or "I'm being authentic now" sets off sirens of alarm.

I conclude that it is just as difficult to be a good modern as to be a good Christian or a good Jew. One must distinguish the doctrinal aim from the personal practice.

Similarly, I do not hold, as Mr.

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Alter asserts in his last sentence, "that the ultimate cause of our present national disarray is an ideal of individualism allegedly deriving from White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism." Philip Slater has stated better than I, in *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, the defects of our particular version of individualism. There are many ideals of individualism, not all admirable. But, actually, I consider not the vapid individualism, but the homogenization pressed upon us by "superculture," the greater menace to the human spirit.

Mr. Alter is correct, of course, in noting that I am in some fashion—not in my politics, nor upon the spectrum of ordinary American usage—profoundly conservative. I believe the purveyors of "future shock" and "change" frequently stand to benefit by the changes they wish to induce in the social fabric, and that real living human beings stand to lose as much as, or even more than, they will gain by acquiescing. A humanistic thinker today must, I believe, be as radically critical of radicals and of partisans of improvement as of the forces of the status quo. Sometimes it seems—it is not merely paranoia—that enemies of mankind stand on all sides, in every camp, even, alas, in oneself.

What I have desired to add to "the common culture" is a critique of autonomy, so as to illuminate the social factors that make it possible and test its genuineness. I wished to take away some of our unwarranted emphasis on the "individual" in our explanations of its meaning. (Messrs. Alter and Podhoretz seem not to stress, as I think they could, how Jewish traditions add to Anglo-Saxon traditions here.) Autonomy is a social achievement. The individual is not an atomic particle, but part of a network of living others, even in his autonomy.

I wished to illuminate some of the creative, liberating, and in any case ineluctable uses of obedience, loyalty, and docility even in the personal achievement and social practices of autonomy. One would expect a Catholic and a Slovak to be especially aware of such possibilities, would one not, even though all other humans, too, share in them daily?

Similarly, I wished to bring to the tradition of authenticity some fruits of the traditions from which I began my trajectory, not in order to weaken, but in order to expand and strengthen, our understanding thereof. No use repeating here my whole chapter, or indeed Lionel Trilling's good essay in these pages ["Authenticity and the Modern Unconscious," September 1971].

Finally, Mr. Alter pays me great respect—I am deeply grateful—by noting the intellectual care I tried to bestow upon my words, even when I seemed to him to be voicing dangerous defenses of the passions, the stomach, the instincts, and other non-rational capacities of humans. It is my deep conviction (tutored in me both by Catholic and by Slavic traditions) that the "irrational" cannot be separated from the "rational" in the typical divisions of modern Western thought.

In my view, the passions carry some insight, intelligence, and judgment in the very fibers of their movement. "The Karamazovs think with their stomachs" is not, to my mind, a declaration of irrationality, nor of a superior rationality, but only a refusal to close one's eyes to *any* source of intelligence. I don't believe that one should *follow* the deliverances of passion automatically; but neither do I believe that "dispassionate inquiry" or "reason" should be followed automatically. The whole self is the seat of such wisdom as we achieve.

I can understand how my emphasis on such matters stimulates uneasiness. But consider the rationality that brings us anti-personnel bombs made with tiny plastic flanges that can penetrate nothing, not even cardboard, except human flesh, and are incapable of detection by X-rays, so that the physician's task with the shredded wounded is seemingly endless.

Contemporary managerial rationalism makes me far more uneasy than classical philosophical rationalism, but the latter, too, falls short. Uneasiness is frequently an index of irreducible experience—two persons accept a commonly stated idea, but neither quite perceives it from the same historical standpoint. I want to assert a common culture, but a pluralism of standpoints, a pluralism of sources of uneasiness. Even were ethnic differences to account for but 10 per cent of our divergences in perception, these would, for the sake of full mutual understanding, be worth explicit notice.

My ultimate hopes for the new ethnicity can be succinctly stated: 1) Among intellectuals, new cultural sources of experience, imagination, and reflection may be brought forward to "the common culture," at a moment when it needs invigoration; 2) among the enlightened, new sensitivities will be developed toward the pain, the needs, and the aspirations of those millions of lower-middle-class whites who bear most of the actual cultural costs of the social progress so necessary if this country is to fulfill its dreams; and 3) among lower-middle-class urban whites, largely Catholic and largely ethnic, a new sense of morale, purpose, and political invigoration will make possible a fresh and more down-to-earth assault upon the evils in our cities that presently discourage black and white, poor and lower-middle class, and all of us.

The problem of morale among lower-middle-class whites seems to me to be the key to forward movement for our society as a whole. It seemed incumbent upon a Catholic and—how I hate the word—an ethnic to tackle it.

MICHAEL NOVAK
Sayville, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

...I would agree, of course, with Norman Podhoretz's comment that we have one culture, a culture indeed which postulates the possibility of wide diversity within it, but still, one culture. I would also agree with Robert Alter's comment on the books by Michael Novak and Peter Schrag that ethnicity is a deceptive prism through which to view everything that occurs in American society. Finally, I am prepared to go along with Harold R. Isaacs's warning ["The New Pluralists," March] that some of the new ethnic enthusiasts can go as far in their enthusiasm as to produce socially-divisive results, though I must say that data available to us would indicate that there is not all that much alienation among the white ethnic groups in American society.

And yet, I am uneasy about the discussion as it is presently taking place—and not merely because I am wondering what a nice Irish boy like me is doing getting involved in a Jewish family fight. In part, my uneasiness comes from the fact that it seems to me that the discussion is notably unencumbered by empirical data. A lot of people in COMMENTARY (and in the New York *Times Book Review* with even less insight) are pontificating about social and cul-

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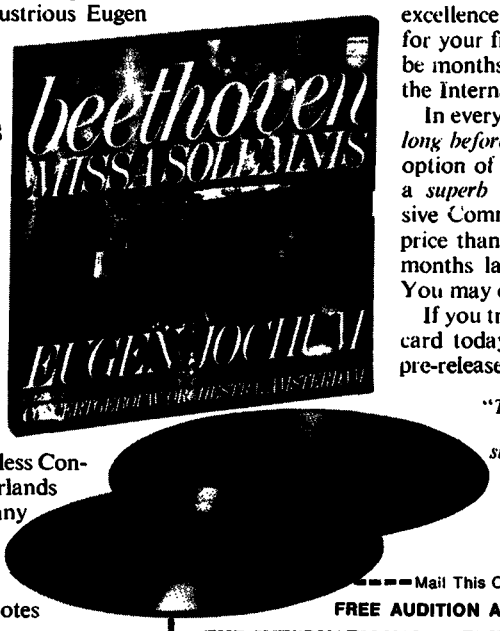

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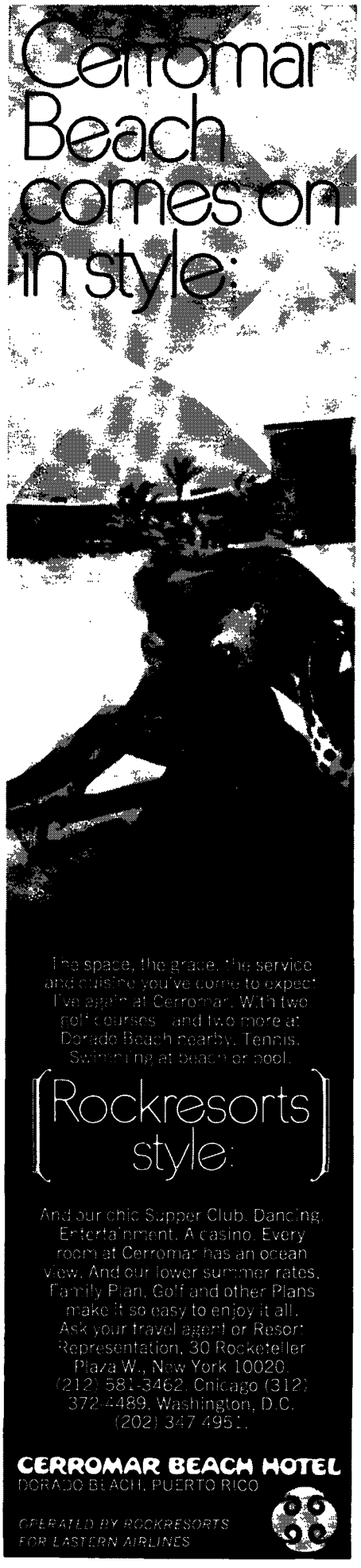
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tural diversity in the United States without having bothered to go through the arduous task of collecting data on that diversity.

But my serious problem with the discussion is that it seems to me to be asking the wrong question. The proper question, it seems to me, is not: "Are there still ethnic groups in American society?," but rather, "Given the fantastic religious, racial, geographic, and nationality differences in American society, how does that society manage to hold together?" I suppose that the way I ask the question implies my own answer to it: "The United States survives not by eliminating cultural diversity but by finding ways to harmonize and balance this diversity within Mr. Podhoretz's all-embracing common culture."

Let me cite some phenomena. The United States was put together, for all practical purposes, in less than a century from some fifty million immigrants of greatly diverse religious, national, and cultural backgrounds. Saxon and Celt murder each other in the north of Ireland; in the United States they get along rather well. Poles and Jews have been enemies for a millennium and more in Europe; in the United States Polish and Jewish trade-union leaders cooperate rather easily. There has only been one civil war in the United States and that was between Anglo-Saxon groups. Is it too much to suggest that no one knows exactly how this relative amiability has come to be?

Secondly, alone of the major North American societies, the United States has always been committed to the notion that all that has been required for citizenship is the acceptance of certain political principles. An Italian immigrant can become an American citizen (and more recently, a Canadian citizen, too), but he can't become a Swede or a German or even a Swiss if he happens to be a guest worker in one of those countries. Why is it that American scholars have made practically no effort to compare the treatment of immigrants in the social democracies of Western Europe with the treatment of immigrants in the United States?

Furthermore, why is it that at a time when ethnic and religious and racial conflicts are tearing apart nation after nation no one seems willing to comment on the fact that the surprising thing about American society is not that we have violence but that, given its newness, its size, and its diversity, American society is so peaceful? Indeed, one might be tempted to ask, "Is there any large multi-national, multi-racial society that the world has ever known that has been so successful at coping with diversity and so willing to face the injustices that it has done to some of the diverse components that constitute it?"

All of this may sound like a Fourth-of-July harangue. For those intellectuals who hate America (and that seems to be most American intellectuals), the suggestion that something can be learned from our ethnic diversity that could benefit other nations in the world will be thought to be close to blasphemy, but surely in COMMENTARY such blasphemy ought to be warmly received.

Finally, let us take the case of the Poles. Our data show that there is still economic discrimination against the Poles, though perhaps not to a very substantial extent. I would be much more concerned, however, about the cultural discrimination—and here I am inclined to think that Mr. Novak makes an important point, though it may be obscured at times by his rhetoric. I daresay that very few American Poles are particularly affronted by the existence of the New York literary and intellectual establishment. Most of them, in fact, don't know of its existence, and if they did, would not be terribly interested in it. My own feeling is that the real problem is that the intellectual arbiters of the country know even less about the Poles than the Poles know about them. Indeed, I suspect that many American intellectuals know more about the Fulani and the Yoruba than they do about the 600,000 Poles stretched out along Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago (which Poles, incidentally, are still more likely to vote Democratic than any other white group in the country).

Is it possible that there are cultural riches in the Polish community from which the whole nation can benefit as it benefits now from the cultural contributions of American Jews, Irish, and, to an increasing extent, blacks? I submit the answer to that is, no one knows, no one has bothered even to investigate the possibility, and no one has particularly encouraged the Poles to explore their own heritage to see if there is any con-

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tribution they could make to the larger society. We have been content with Polack jokes and pictures in *Harper's* of Stanley Kowalski-type characters sitting on bar stools in their undershirts.

This may not be so evil a form of discrimination as that practiced against American blacks, but it's discrimination just the same. It is also, I would submit, a foolish waste.

ANDREW M. GREELEY
Director, Center for the
Study of American Pluralism
University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert Alter's analysis of the resurgence of ethnicity comes dangerously close to presenting a case-study of the intellectual posing as the voice of the people in that he unwittingly expresses the *Volkstum* of America regarding racism in our society. His faulty analysis reflects the failure of America to accept the fact that this is a racist society. Mr. Alter faults Peter Schrag and Michael Novak because of their overstatement of "the case against the already abundantly berated Wasp." According to Mr. Alter they offer a "racist reading of American history." But the Schrag-Novak interpretation of America, regarded as faulty by Mr. Alter, is in fact an accurate and precise perception of the racial-ethnic factor in American history. A nation of immigrants can only be interpreted from the perspective of interaction among the various nationalities. . . . America does not want to face the fact that it has reacted in racist fashion to non-Wasp elements.

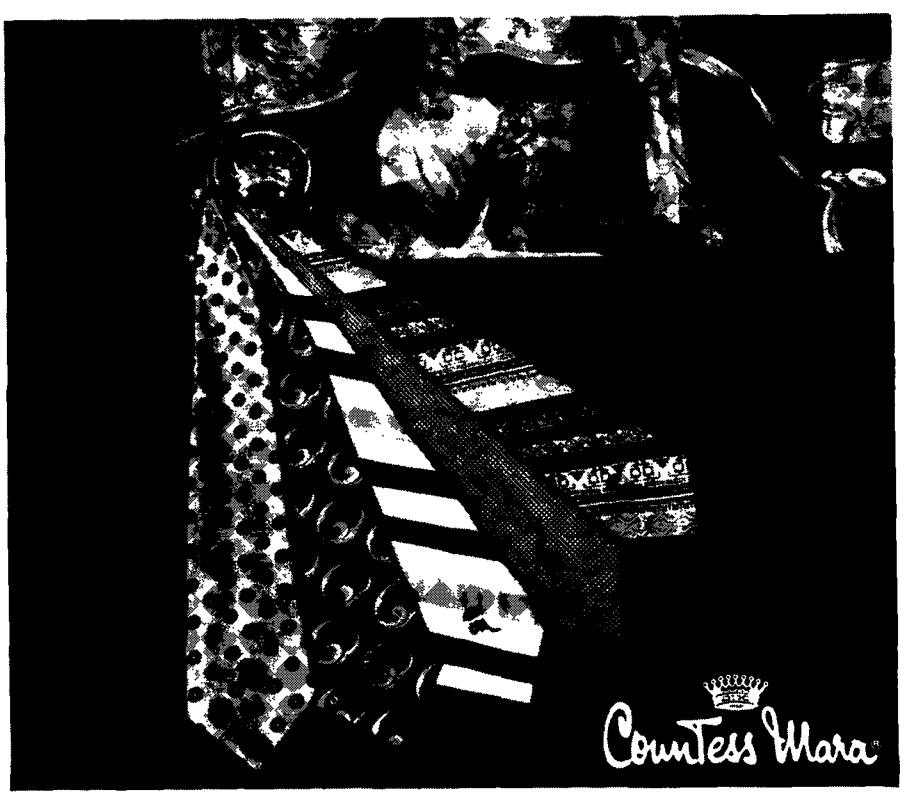
Mr. Alter also states that he is suspicious of the political philosophy of ethnicity for it might compromise and circumscribe the individual's discovery of his own unique nature. But the racist suppression of ethnicity in America has occurred throughout the history of immigration. For example, during World War I the German language was forbidden in twenty-six states as a medium of expression in schools, churches, newspapers, and on the telephone. . . .

Mr. Alter's faulty analysis rests on an inaccurate definition of "ethnicity," which he defines as "keeping up dilute enclaves of old-country ways in the new." The inaccuracy of this definition gives rise to a basically Wasp-ish miscomprehension of the ethos of the new pluralism-particularism. The new ethnicity does not, and cannot, involve a return to the old ethnic life-style of the ghetto neighborhood community. As Norman Podhoretz notes, it would be false to imply that the only choices are between becoming a facsimile Wasp or staying an old-style ethnic. The new ethnicity is something else, for it is an expression of the third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation descendants of the original immigrants. It is an expression of their identity crisis along with their repudiation of the Wasp cultural soul. The culture of the new ethnic can never be pure Polish, Slovak, or Greek, for it is always hyphenated and hybrid: a synthesis of two cultural realms. . . . The boundaries of the new ethnicity cannot be delineated in terms of enclaves and geographical entities. The Wasp can only think of ethnic Americans in terms of the ghettos which they inhabit. He cannot comprehend that a whole world-view, ethic, and life-style inhabit the head of an ethnic. . . . Ethnicity is the first step in individual awareness and consciousness. All too often an individual finds that his ethnic group has been the object of persecution in America. Is he then supposed to evade the responsibility of concluding that a racist factor is at work in American history? An Indian, black, or Mexican-American would not answer in the affirmative.

D. HEINRICH TOLZMANN
Minneapolis, Minnesota

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In Robert Alter's commentary on Michael Novak we read: "The Wasp elite has much to answer for in American history, from the virulent Nordic racism it once promulgated to its hypocritical ideology of egalitarian individualism as a mask for privilege and the denial of the dignity of new immigrants implicit in its myth of the melting pot." It seems to me that the Wasp elite could be charged with more serious crimes; at least, I do not share the implicit assumption of the sentence: that it is worse to justify wrong than to do it. . . . Though I agree that the ideas mentioned by Mr. Alter have been put to perverse and dangerous



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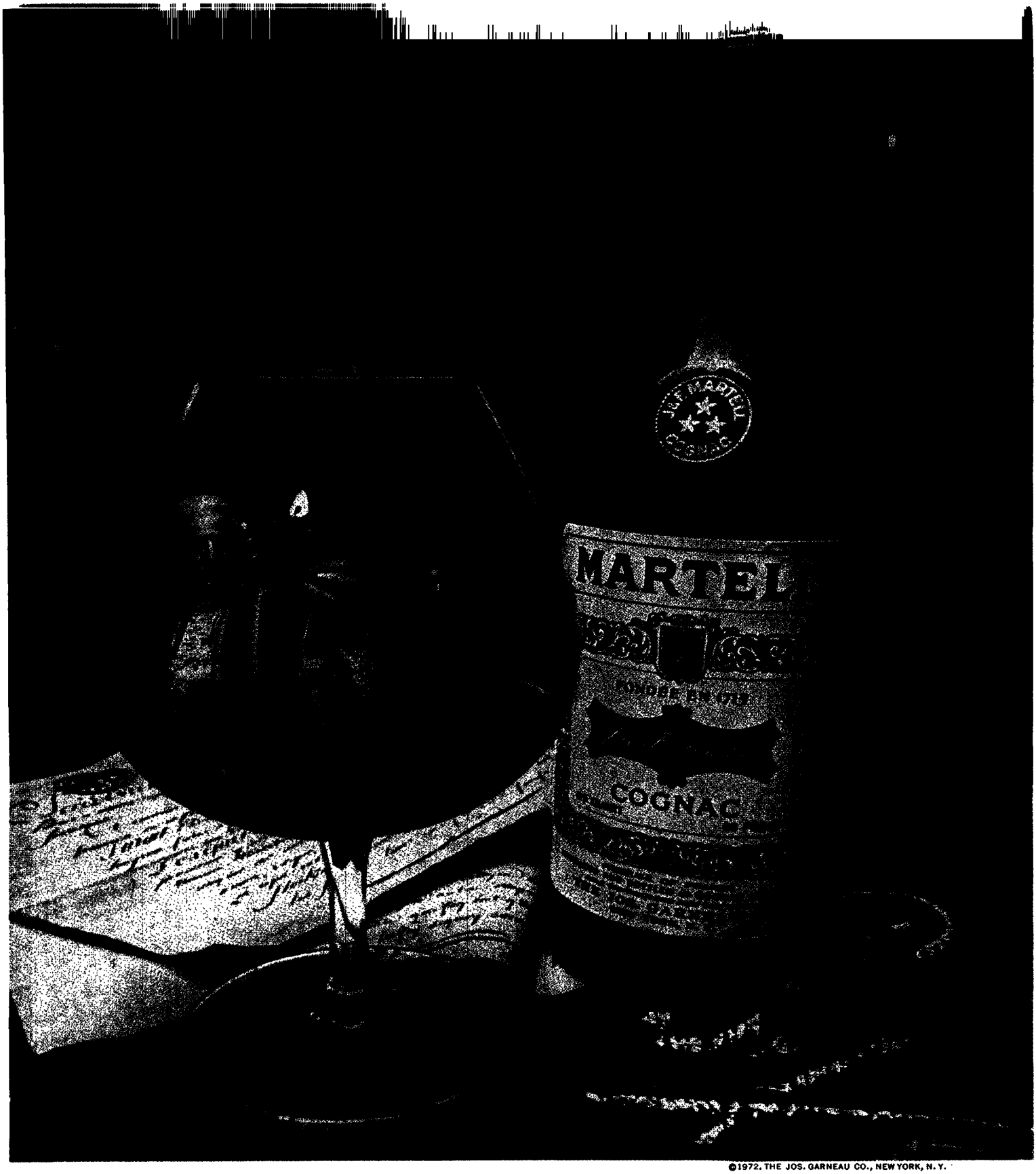

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uses, I doubt that "egalitarian individualism" and the "myth of the melting pot" are really part of the ideology of that Wasp elite to which, historically, I belong

In the first instance, the phrase "Wasp elite" is a canard which lumps together Wasps of various ethnic backgrounds and intellectual traditions, thereby denying them all any ethnic authenticity; and it is also a canard, because it silently attributes this faceless, soulless character to a tiny and politically insignificant minority of Wasps, usually dubbed "Puritans."

I take it, for example, that Mr. Alter means by "Wasp elite" not so much intellectuals like Emerson as the patriciate that Emerson was criticizing—those whose ideology found its ultimate expression in *The Education of Henry Adams*; and I suppose—from the general tenor of his remarks elsewhere in his article—that he largely excludes from the "Wasp elite" the patriciate of the South, a genuinely ethnic minority whose ideologies cannot be charged with the egalitarian individualism of Jefferson. If he includes Jacksonian democracy and the populism of the 60's that developed the "myth of the melting pot" in his concept of this Wasp ideology, it remains, perhaps, Wasp, but it ceases to be the possession of an elite. By his "Wasp elite," I suppose he means, or silently allows the innuendo, that the responsibility for these ideas may be laid at the door of that queer little group of Wasps whom Burke called "the dissidence of dissent," and who, since 1865, have been so little concerned with American politics. Without some precisions of this sort, I find it difficult to see why the adjective should be linked to the noun, or why we should consider their combination a genuine class, capable of "promulgating" an ideology.

To illustrate this intellectual confusion, I would only adduce the older vogue, from Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* to Santayana's *The Last Puritan* and Miller's *The Crucible*, of criticizing this Wasp elite for its ethnic purism, tending to totalitarianism. Surely the Puritan, with his broad-brimmed hat and buckled shoes, is as much an ethnic type as the Satmar *rebbe*; and I can assure Mr. Alter that he is viewed with the same exasperated affection and sense of inauthenticity by his descendants. . . .

HUGH AMORY
Shaker Heights, Ohio

ROBERT ALTER writes:

Michael Novak's reply seems to me to counterbalance the argument of his book in a very useful way, stating something of the other side of the dialectic between individual and collectivity neglected by the polemical emphasis of the book. The clarification he makes about the common culture and the different trajectories along which we approach it focuses the entire question much better than the formulations in his book, and I don't think we now differ seriously on the issue. Indeed, the tone and substance of his whole response to my article illustrate the strength of our common culture, in which civilized discourse can be used to clarify thinking about shared problems.

D. Heinrich Tolzmann's tirade on racism, by contrast, illustrates precisely the opposite—how conjuring with cant terms and slogans can obfuscate thought. I'm not sure whether Mr. Tolzmann has any clear notion of what racism really means, but the chief example he offers—an instance of American war hysteria during World War I—is hardly reassuring. I will refrain from enumerating the confusions in which his letter abounds, observing only that the much debased Weberian term, "life-style," surely suffers an ultimate abuse when it is said to "inhabit the head of an ethnic."

It is always edifying to be advised, as Norman Podhoretz and I are by Andrew M. Greeley, that one is asking the wrong question, but, in any event, his observation about the remarkable ability of American society to harmonize diversity is a helpful corrective to current discussion that places such stress on our divisiveness.

Finally, let me thank Hugh Amory for reminding me how dangerously easy it is to talk about these large cultural questions with general formulas that do not account for the diversity of the phenomena they pretend to describe. His point is well taken that "Wasp elite" is a concept which should not be accepted uncritically, as I'm afraid I did, picking it up inadvertently from Peter Schrag rather than from Michael Novak.

Growing Pains

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Some comments on Rudolf Klein's article on *The Limits to Growth* ["Growth and Its Enemies," June]. Obviously, the fact that predictions of this general cast have been made and discredited before constitutes only feeble evidence against the validity of this one, as even a casual familiarity with the history of science makes evident. Mr. Klein is quite right that what matters is the validity of the reasoning that leads to such conclusions. However, his attempt to analyze the methods used in *The Limits to Growth* reveals that he doesn't understand the workings of such models well enough to perform any competent critique of their assumptions: the core of his review is, quite simply, nonsense. No model of this sort assumes that trends will remain constant in such a way that by the year 2000 everyone will be either an ecologist, in a hospital, a pot smoker, or belong to any other such patently non-self-sufficient category: one of the features of these models is precisely that their structure forestalls such silly predictions. The models do assume structural relationships that are invariant over time, and they do use trend-fitting, but from this Mr. Klein's summary of the method does not follow. He clearly does not understand the significance of nonlinearities in feedback loops.

Further evidence of hasty, careless reading is Mr. Klein's statement that *The Limits to Growth* ignores the proportionate growth of health and education expenditures in developed nations. Although the models for possible alternative policies are regrettably crude, it is wrong to suggest that the authors ignore the fact that there may be a price to pay for following their recommendations.

Basically, what needs to be done is to identify the real constraints and the real possibilities, not to counter oversimplifications with worse ones. . . .

VIRGIL E. VICKERS
Auburndale, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Rudolf Klein compares the authors of *The Limits to Growth* with the soothsayers who consulted the entrails of a slaughtered ox. This is grossly unfair: the slaughtered ox was, presumably, accessible for inspection to the Roman public; but the authors of *The Limits to Growth* have yet to publish their computer programs.

PETR BECKMANN
University of Colorado
Boulder, Colorado

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It is very popular now to blame technology and technological advance for the problems of ecology and pollution. Some applied sciences such as physics and engineering are also under attack. The next logical step is to broaden the attack to include the very foundations of the physical sciences—mathematics and the scientific method. In "Growth and Its Enemies," Rudolf Klein launches an attack on the tools of science—computers, systems analysis, etc.—using as his scapegoat *The Limits to Growth*, one of the most promising books of our time, which treats ecological problems quantitatively, employing the methods of science and modern technology.

Mr. Klein argues less with the results of the book than with the methods by which the results were obtained. For him the unforgivable sin committed by the authors of *The Limits to Growth* is that they use computers. . . . In his concluding paragraph he sums up his fears: "It is desperately important that complex problems should not be reduced to the simple symmetry required of systems analysis. This is, if anything, the final surrender to technology—to adjust our own vision of problems to the technical necessities of feeding them into a computer."

As one who has been a systems analyst, I can assure Mr. Klein that systems analysis does not require that complex problems be reduced to simple symmetry. On the contrary, with the advent of modern computers, there is a tendency not to reduce complex problems to any simpler form, but to retain much more of the original complexity. It is true that the use of computers is a technical convenience, often indeed a necessity, but it permits a wider vision of the problems and is in no sense a surrender to technology. Instead, this technology has the potential to liberate us from ecological perils. . . .

Mr. Klein should not fear the computer, he should fear the uses to which it is sometimes put by those in power. He can best conquer his fears by offering constructive ideas in his own field of political science. It is when he ventures out of his field that he goes astray. . . .

FRANK L. PAULSEN
Hawthorne, California

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RUDOLF KLEIN writes:

It is tempting to answer Virgil E. Vickers by saying that if I do not understand "nonlinearities in feedback loops," then neither does he understand straightforward prose as distinct from jargon. However, I think that both his angry reaction and that of Frank L. Paulsen to my article point to a real difficulty in dealing with a book like *The Limits to Growth*. The book is addressing two quite different audiences: those who, like myself, are primarily interested in its social, political, and cultural assumptions and those who, like my critics here, are concerned chiefly with the technical processes of systems analysis and computer programming. The two audiences often do not speak the same language, with the result that there is a dialogue of the deaf.

So let me make one more attempt to spell out the theme of my article. First of all, I did realize that the projections used in *The Limits to Growth* were far more sophisticated than my (I had hoped faintly-funny but, as it seems, taken-too-seriously) examples about pot smoking, etc. But Mr. Vickers misses the real point here. I was not arguing that the methods were inadequate, since I am in no way competent to judge them. I was, however, questioning the way in which *The Limits to Growth* was applying its perhaps brilliant methods to draw what seem to me to be misleadingly firm conclusions about the future.

Indeed Mr. Vickers himself unerringly puts his finger on the basic flaw in the whole exercise. The models, he writes, "assume structural relationships that are invariant over time." This seems to be a very big, very dangerous, and very dubious assumption to make; in my view, therefore, no amount of technical skill in computer programming can make the whole exercise other than an irrational form of predestinarianism. One example illustrates this point. A few years ago economists were arguing that the "structural relationships" of the British economy were such that excessive wage claims and inflation could only be prevented by increasing the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate has now gone up well beyond the recommended figure, but the rate of inflation has gone up faster still. It just so happens that the "structural relationships" have changed and thus made the model out of date. There could be no clearer indication of the perils of using historical patterns to construct models for predicting the future.

Again, Mr. Vickers asserts that the authors of *The Limits to Growth* do take into account "the fact that there may be a price to pay for following their recommendations." If by that he means that the book contains the odd sentence or two recognizing that a zero growth rate may bring problems of its own, then he is right and I am wrong. If, however, one thinks that both sides of the equation—the debits of growth and the problems of non-growth—should be examined in equal depth and detail before even attempting to make any recommendations, then he is wrong and I was right. It is because *The Limits to Growth* is so one-sided in its approach—its intellectual naiveté disguised under a show of technical sophistication—that I consider it a rather frivolous book.

Lastly, let me assure Frank L. Paulsen that I am not anti-computer: one of my best friends, in my current researches, is a computer which faithfully churns out a great deal of data. My main concern is that technical wizardry should remain the servant of policy-making and not become a substitute.

Genetic Bookkeeping

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As the mother of a beautiful and bright but genetically-defective (spina bifida) son, I was encouraged to read Norman Podhoretz's and Samuel McCracken's defense of life and reproductive freedom in the May issue ["Beyond ZPG" and "The Population Controllers," respectively]. The authors express justified horror over the eugenic implications in population control. Surely the state should never interfere in so personal a matter as whether or not two people want to have or keep a child.

But Messrs. Podhoretz and McCracken in their own emotional rebuttals to the population alarmists address themselves only to the theoretical aspects of the question. The hard, immediate problems remain; for example, to what ends should a doctor go to keep alive a defective child? Or should a doctor use such new tools as amniocentisis to detect a defective fetus?

When my son was born in 1950 very little was known about spina bifida and few surgeons would or could operate to close the spine. The tough and lucky babies survived. Now a rapidly growing number of very severely handicapped children survive. By and large doctors make the decision to fight for life regardless of the consequences, and the mother and child bear the brunt of heartache, physical pain, emotional burdens, and financial strain.

The neurosurgeon made the decision to operate on my son, and I am thankful that he is one of the fortunate few who survived with a minimal handicap. Even so, it has been hard for him and for me; we can appreciate the terrible burdens of the severely afflicted and their families. Their survival is one of the tragic ironies of medical progress. One cannot write this irony off with the "slippery-slope" argument as Mr. Podhoretz does.

Now that the authors have purged themselves of their repugnance to the population planners, I would like them to address themselves to the practical problems of what to do *now* with the knowledge we have. Where and how do we strike a balance between what we know and what we should do? Theory is fine, but it is a long way from the firing line.

LUREE MILLER

London, England

SAMUEL MCCRACKEN writes:

Because Luree Miller writes from the firing line, I would naturally listen to her very carefully, even did I not already generally agree with her. As I have pointed out, one of the great weaknesses of much population-control writing is a fondness for a terrible simplification ("a woman should have the right to control her own body"; "quality of life, not quantity"), perhaps plausible in theory but certainly very difficult in practice. It is easier to recite the slogan about control of the body than to decide when, if ever, a fetus has rights one must respect. (The fetus is currently in a confused legal status: because it can inherit property, the court will appoint a guardian to protect its right to do so; but its right to life itself is increasingly compromised.) Also, it is rather easier to establish criteria for quantity than for quality.

Just such an awareness of practical complications makes me very skeptical of terrible simplifications,

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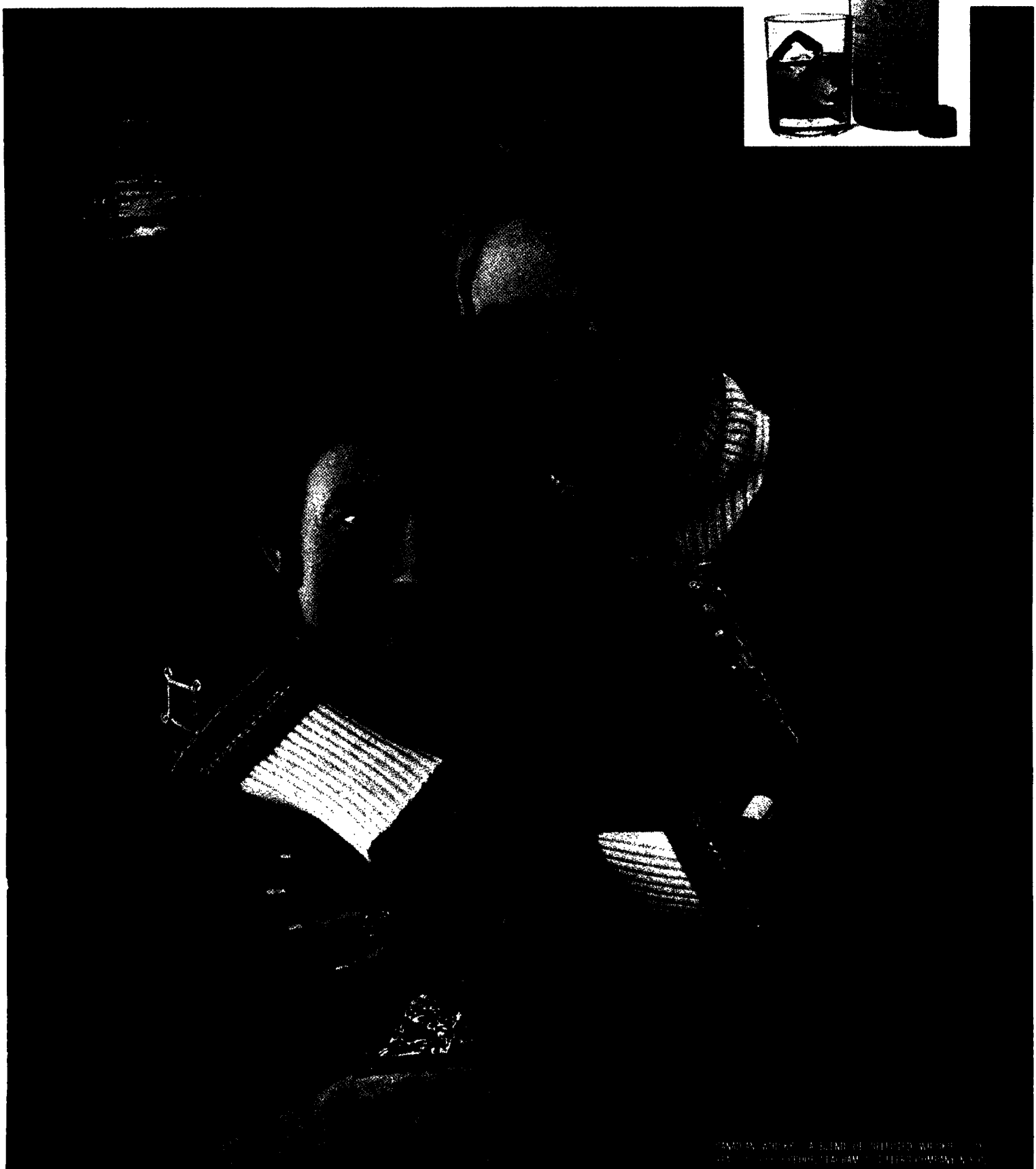

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one of which is Mrs. Miller's term "genetically defective." Her son, as she says, has beauty, intelligence, and a defective spinal cord. Does this make him more or less defective than someone with a dull-normal intellect and a normal spinal cord? Or, for that matter, than someone with the same beauty and intelligence and a genetically impeccable spinal cord damaged by accident? Or, on balance, are we to regard all three as equally defective?

Setting up a system of genetic bookkeeping is not going to be simple.

If we continue the traditional policy of protecting life at all costs, inevitably we will produce more and more handicapped persons, many of whom, along with their families, will endure the anguish of which Mrs. Miller writes; this is one of those costs. But the complementary policy of singling out for death the genetically inadequate (even if we knew what the term meant) will have its own little ironies, perceived or not. In an age when respectable physicians write in respectable medical journals of the desirability of involuntary affirmative euthanasia as a tool for population control, we seem to be freeing ourselves of silly sentimentalisms about the sanctity of life in general; but even the new realists ought to have second thoughts about the possibility of killing someone who but for his cleft palate or club foot might have lived to vanquish cancer for the rest of us.

The traditional attitude to this question awards the benefit of the doubt to life, the view now being so widely urged upon us, to death. As long as these are the alternatives, choosing between them turns out not to be so difficult after all.

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

I have nothing to add to Samuel McCracken's letter except to say Amen.

Housing

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Roger Starr's article on "scatter-site," low-income housing ["The Lesson of Forest Hills," June] provides a hard-headed investigation of the assumptions behind one of the popular solutions to our country's complex social problems. It is understandable how people

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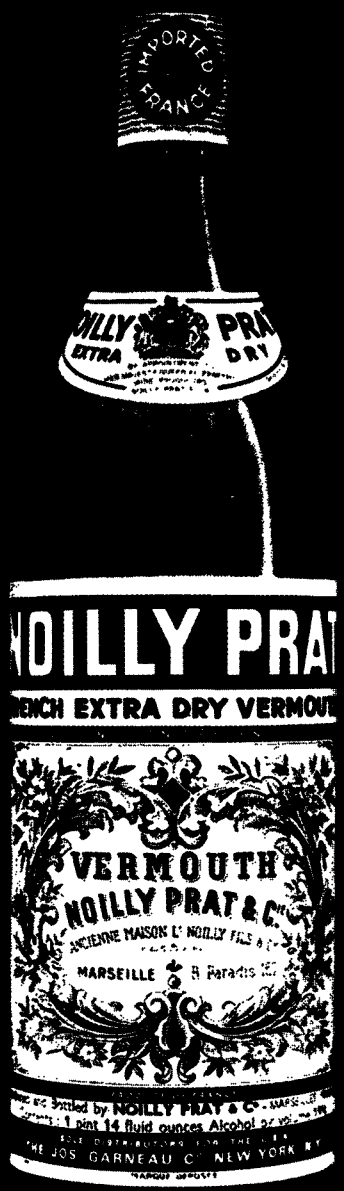

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frustrated with our society's lack of progress in remedying past injustices will grasp at a seemingly self-evident good—in this instance, ending residential concentrations of the poor—without thorough consideration. These people hope that the poor will benefit from being housed in non-poor neighborhoods through proximity to families with middle-class values; in turn, it is thought that middle-class families will benefit by getting to know low-income and minority families first-hand. I myself instinctively believe that such an approach is desirable.

But though I favor such an approach, I am also dismayed at how little thought has gone into its adoption. While the idea of scatter-site housing is on its way to becoming common wisdom, one is pressed to find an articulated rationale for the concept: i.e., a statement of the specific justification for it or a definition in quantitative terms of the concept itself, the possible counter-arguments, standards against which to measure its success, conceivable negative reactions, etc. Not only is no such rationale available, but attempts to discuss the issue are met with scorn and condemnation. . . .

Here in Baltimore, our discussions with many HUD officials have failed to reveal any departmental analysis of the issues raised by Mr. Starr, and our attempts to obtain a written elaboration of HUD's position have met with consistent failure.

COMMENTARY has performed a real service by serving as the first forum for the candid discussion of the issues involved, and I hope it is only the beginning of a thorough exploration of the entire question.

R. C. EMBRY, JR.
Commissioner, Department of
Housing and Community
Development
Baltimore, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Roger Starr's article attempts to rationalize the prejudices of those opposed to the introduction of decent housing for lower-income families into neighborhoods outside existing slum and racial ghettos.

While stating (sometimes incorrectly) the wrongs of present public-housing programs, Mr. Starr provides no practical solution to the housing problems of the poor. His theories leave racial minorities and the poor no choice but to remain confined within areas riddled with unemployment, poor schools, decay, and neglect. He is content to leave the poor to those areas singled out for low-rent housing under previous federal containment-concentration practices, areas already hopelessly overburdened and unable to obtain adequate municipal and social services. Racial equality will never be achieved if the only concern is with social peace rather than with equal rights and opportunity.

The basis from which Mr. Starr attempts to influence public attitudes is flawed by several misrepresentations of fact. He fails to convey a true picture.

Mr. Starr is far too casual in categorically dismissing the social benefits of heterogeneous living on the West Side of Manhattan. How does he support the statement that "it remains difficult to point to one concrete social result of the intermingling of diverse income groups . . . "? Does his statement that "there would be no need to revitalize ghettos if low-rent housing could be built outside" mean that he is proposing that vast tracts of prime land near the hub of our business districts should be left barren wastes? In addition, several inaccuracies appear in his discussion of the Project Selection Criteria promulgated by the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD).

Mr. Starr's views seem to echo the paternalistic liberalism of years past, the kind of thinking which has helped to make the blacks and the poor more comfortable in their misery rather than to create the environment and opportunity for people to gain upward mobility—to escape the ghetto. . . .

Since COMMENTARY reaches a national audience, it should also be noted that the Forest Hills controversy is strictly local in that housing practices, demand, and costs are different in New York City from any other American metropolis. I worry that the Forest Hills affair will only serve to confirm the fears about public housing in those areas where more conventional approaches to scatter-site housing are in fact possible. . . .

Blacks, Jews, and other minorities ought not to allow Forest Hills to become a symbol of division and confrontation. We should direct our energies toward making it work and developing a "showcase" model of the "haves" helping the "have nots." This, to me, can become the real lesson of Forest Hills. . . .

WILLIAM R. MORRIS
Director of Housing Programs
NAACP
New York City

ROGER STARR writes:

William R. Morris and I are both concerned with the basic question of how the low-income black family is to increase its chances of attaining higher income and a more nearly satisfactory level of housing choice. My point is that the scatter-site program, at best, offers only a symbolic change, affecting a few people without clearly improving their economic prospects. I suggest that the HUD Project Selection Criteria deprive black Americans of the right to live in better housing in areas of the cities in which many black people say they want to live. I am not aware of any inaccuracies in my account of the guidelines or the facts, and Mr. Morris's failure to be specific in his criticism of both leaves me blind and mute. Although he suggests that the HUD guidelines affect New York only, complaints are rising from conscientious citizens and officials in Baltimore, Chicago, and other cities that the net effect of the guidelines nationally is to cut back housing opportunities for the great mass of poor black citizens in order to achieve social symbolism of dubious meaning. The *Housing Affairs Letter* of August 11, 1972 reports that the NAACP Convention "opposes HUD Project Selection Criteria, and wants them scrapped as divisive."

HUD is now trying to play down the importance of the guidelines, but their words speak for themselves. If Mr. Morris thinks that the suggestion of locating low-income housing near employment opportunities is a prescription for social peace, I would urge him to attend more hearings before local zoning review boards in the areas where such housing developments are proposed. I wish the matter could be done peacefully, but if economic opportunities can only be achieved by obstinacy in the face of resistance, let us at least be obstinate in a cause that will clearly profit its intended beneficiaries.

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Friend of the Court

To the Editor of Commentary:

I do not know enough about the ouster of Professor Bruce Franklin at Stanford to become embroiled in the controversy on the merits between my friend and colleague, Alan M. Dershowitz, and my friend and former student, Herbert L. Packer. But one criticism contained in Mr. Packer's reply to Mr. Dershowitz [Letters from Readers, August] contains such potential for misleading lay readers that I would like to comment on it.

Mr. Packer takes Mr. Dershowitz to task for being "already committed . . . to Franklin's cause" while at the same time purporting to be a representative of "disinterested opinion" in filing a brief in the case as *amicus curiae* for the American Civil Liberties Union. If I understand Mr. Dershowitz's commitment in the Franklin case (and I believe I do), it is only to the position that Franklin's views, which Mr. Dershowitz considers "despicable" and hopes to see "rejected" by society, are protected by the First Amendment. It could hardly have come as a surprise to the Stanford Advisory Board that an *amicus* brief filed for the ACLU would take that position.

It may nonetheless come as a surprise to a lay reader that an *amicus*, or "friend of the court," brief need not take a "disinterested" position. That, indeed, was the early function of the *amicus* at common law when he was literally expected to assist the court in its judging function. But, as lawyers well know, it has long since evolved into something else in this country. As is amply demonstrated in a 1963 article in the Yale *Law Journal* (which Mr. Packer as a loyal Yale alumnus must read), the *amicus* in our practice has for the most part shifted from neutrality to advocacy as the courts have encouraged "partisan third-party involvement" in the cases before them.

Hence it is that the rules of the Supreme Court of the United States require that an application for leave to file an *amicus* brief shall "state the nature of the applicant's interest" in the case. Hence it is that in a very recent case before the Court, involving the constitutionality of Pennsylvania confession-of-judgment clauses in consumer notes, an *amicus* brief was filed by the Pennsylvania Savings and Loan League, whose members are some of the principal beneficiaries of such clauses.

Since Mr. Dershowitz in behalf of the ACLU was, with no impropriety, aligned with Franklin on one issue in his case, there was no impropriety either in his having "spent a couple of hours with Franklin" before preparing the *amicus* brief, nor in the fact that Mr. Dershowitz's research assistant (whether paid for his research duties by Mr. Dershowitz or by Harvard) gave some assistance to Franklin.

In view of all of this, I can only marvel at the sinister changes Mr. Packer rings on the facts that only

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Mr. Dershowitz and Franklin know what went on during their two-hour conference and that Mr. Dershowitz and his research assistant are close friends.

VERN COUNTRYMAN
Harvard University Law School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

HERBERT L. PACKER writes:

I regret that apparently my friend and former teacher, Vern Countryman, missed the point that I was making about Mr. Dershowitz, the ACLU, and the Franklin case. Historically, the ACLU has been distinguished for two things: its disinterest and its adherence to principle. One might have assumed that the person who wrote the ACLU *amicus* brief was acting in that spirit. I intended to show that Mr. Dershowitz was not disinterested in that sense. I gave substance to that assertion and Mr. Dershowitz has documented that assertion not just once but again in his September letter, showing a high degree of ego-involvement; Mr. Dershowitz and Franklin had a "privileged" discussion during the hearing well before the *amicus* brief was filed (that was the "sinister change" that I was ringing). Mr. Dershowitz's assistant was Franklin's counsel during the hearing. Further, Mr. Dershowitz said that he would have represented Franklin had he not been prevented by his understanding with the Center (apparently he is less free in his leisure time than he claims that his assistant was). Mr. Dershowitz persuaded the ACLU to enter the case, not the other way around. My response to Mr. Dershowitz's letter in the August issue was an attempt to set the record straight, to remove from Mr. Dershowitz the awesome mantle of pure disinterest generally associated with the ACLU and the role of *amicus* (in the minds of the laity, as Mr. Countryman has pointed out).

Mr. Countryman, a noted civil libertarian, was right not to become "embroiled in the controversy" since he "does not know enough about the ouster of Professor Franklin." I am glad that he has given me an opportunity to correct some of the confusion. I wonder what has happened to the cause of Franklin and of the University in all this involved correspondence.

Writers and Politics

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Unlike his biblical namesake who brought down Goliath with a well-aimed stone, David Bromwich, in his review of *The Politics of Twentieth-Century Novelists* [April], misses the mark. . . . It seems bizarre that he should devote so much space to T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (who are not discussed in the book) and not say anything about most of the novelists who are analyzed in the collection. He is unhappy because the book contains essays on Steinbeck, Dos Passos, and Wells, but one looks in vain in his review for any comment on, or even mention of, the articles on Lawrence, Malraux, Mailer, Solzhenitsyn, Kazantzakis, Grass, Faulkner, Greene, and the other novelists found in the book.

Mr. Bromwich berates the editor (George A. Panichas) for allegedly imposing on the contributors "editorial inhibitions." As one of the contributors to the volume, I know this statement to be inaccurate. Professor Panichas gave us complete freedom in the writing of our essays, and neither Professor Panichas nor John W. Aldridge claimed that the book was intended to be "literary criticism," as Mr. Bromwich insists. The book was intended as a scholarly work to illuminate the political ambience of some representative 20th-century novelists.

Clearly, Mr. Bromwich is not happy in being assigned to assess a work of scholarship. He admits that "I have not stayed long" with all the scholar-critics in the book (a rather startling admission) and complains about "the sheer size of the book . . . over three hundred pages of novelistic politics." Had he done his job more carefully, he would have realized that the book contains much more than is suggested in his fuzzy term "novelistic politics"; similarly, he would have learned that not "Every discussion of an author proceeds biographically in the ABC fashion, as though the editor had set himself to compiling a reference book for reasonably bright high-school students." . . .

Perhaps the real clue to Mr. Bromwich's unhappiness about the book lies in his statement that "after reading several of the well-balanced assessments in this collection, I began to long for critics who might exhibit strong opinions of their own, however reckless." Mr. Bromwich need have no fear: he has achieved his own desideratum as a critic.

MILTON BIRNBAUM
Chairman, Department of English
American International College
Springfield, Massachusetts

DAVID BROMWICH writes:

Milton Birnbaum subjects me to a violent flow of contradiction —my namesake, oh dear!—but I search his letter in vain for a single counter-example. Which of the contributors to *The Politics of Twentieth-Century Novelists* rose above the political occasion to write valuable literary criticism? I at any rate listed the names of two or three critics who seemed almost to have burst the bounds of the governing editorial idea. Almost but not quite, because the emphasis of the book was at last political rather than literary, as Mr. Birnbaum correctly notes, though Aldridge's Preface and Panichas's Introduction led me to expect otherwise. These introductory pieces, fuzzy-minded, poorly managed, largely irrelevant to the enterprise at hand, were perhaps an aspect of the book which I paid the compliment of benign neglect, and Mr. Birnbaum should read them again if he wants to see how I could have been misled. An editorial design was not strictly carried through, according to this contributor, and I believe him. Evidently the editor gathered his men about him, and they, fairly independently, began to think about writers through the medium of politics, where they should have done it the other way around.

Political concern is useful to criticism when the writer, not his politics, is the thing of first importance. That was all I wrote. Does it really sound very shocking? As for Eliot, Pound, and Company, they were surely not extracurricular: Panichas himself spoke of them at some length. I finished the review by saying, in as pleasant a tone as I could manage, that this book did not hold my attention terribly well, a statement which Mr. Birnbaum now hands back to me as a confession of incompetence. The book, I can only repeat, is boring.

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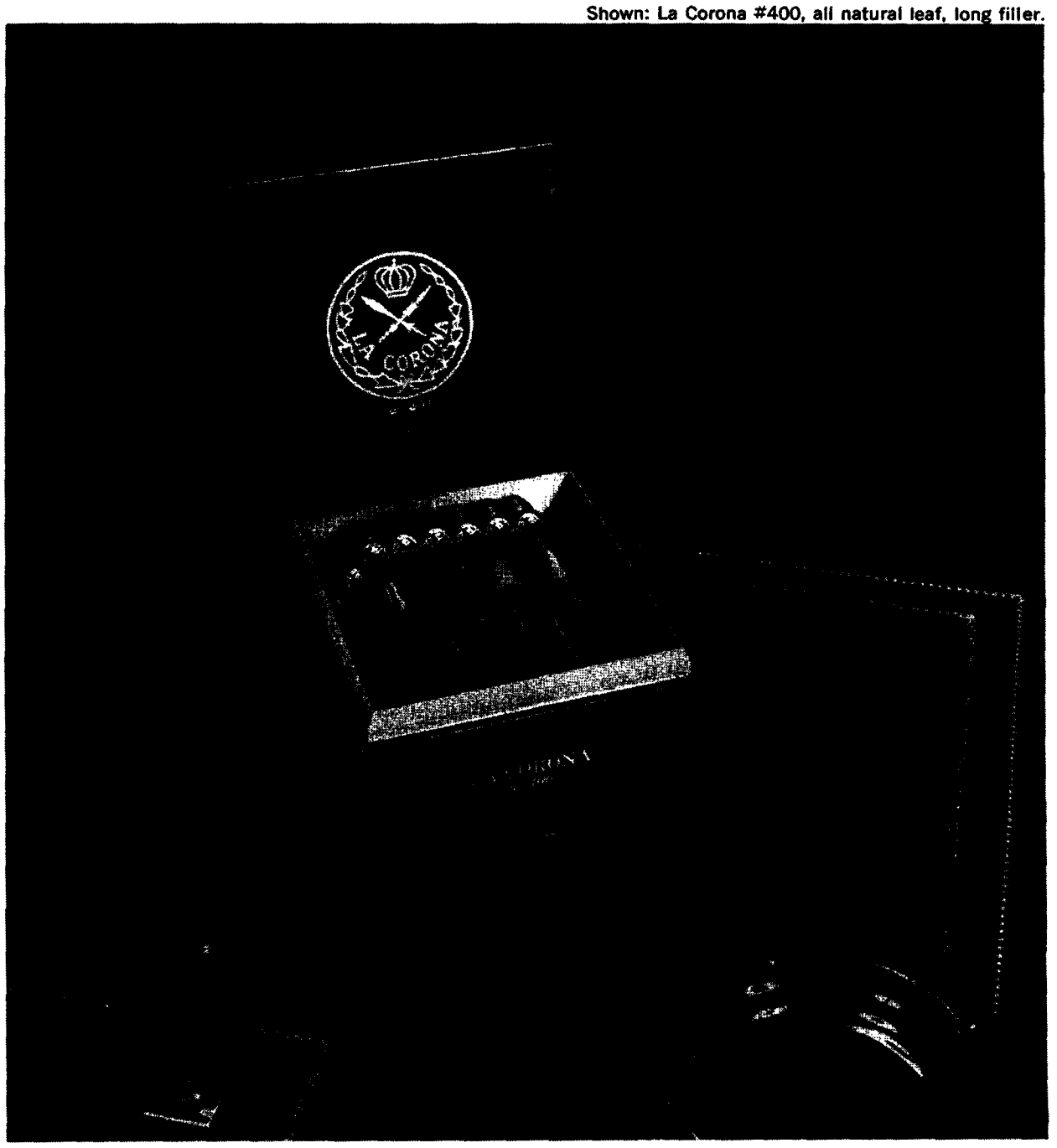

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The Age of the Avant-Garde

Hilton Kramer

How strange a thing it was to understand
And how strange it ought to be again, this time
Without the distortions of the theatre,
Without the revolutions' ruin,
In the presence of the barefoot ghosts!
—Wallace Stevens

IN HIS *Histoire de la littérature francaise de 1789 à nos jours*, published in 1936, the French critic Albert Thibaudet speaks of the three "revolutions" that the Symbolist movement brought to the writing of poetry in France. The first was a revolution in literary technique—"the liberation of verse" that exempted poetry from rhyme and syllabic scansion and thus "created a rupture between 'normal' poets and 'free-verse' poets." The second was a revolution in the ultimate objective of poetic style—"the advent of pure poetry," the attempt, as Mallarmé put it, "to recapture the best in music" and thereby create a poetry in which "the words take the initiative." But it was the third of these revolutions that proved to be the most fateful—"the idea itself of revolution." Symbolism, Thibaudet writes,

> accustomed literature to the idea of indefinite revolution, an artistic Blanquism, a right and duty of youth to overturn the preceding generation, to run after an absolute. If the poets were divided into "normal," or "regular," and free-verse, literature was divided into normal literature and literature of the "avant-garde." The chronic avant-gardism of poetry, the "What's new?" of the "informed" public, the official part given to the young, the proliferation of schools and manifestos with which these young hastened to occupy that extreme point, to attain for an hour that crest of the wave in a tossing sea—all this was not only a new development in 1885 but a new climate in French literature. The Symbolist revolution, the last thus far, might perhaps have been definitively the last, because it incorporated the theme of chronic revolution into the normal condition of literature.

The "new climate" of 1885 has indeed become the "normal condition" of a good deal more than literature. It has become the basis of our entire cultural life. Thibaudet's "What's new?" is no longer the exclusive possession of a tiny "informed" public. It is now the daily concern of vast bureaucratic enterprises whose prosperity depends on keeping the question supplied with a steady flow of compelling but perishable answers. The "right and duty of youth to overturn the preceding generation" is an established datum in the academic curriculum, and "that crest of the wave in a tossing sea" has long been turned into a public facility drawing record crowds.

For the "normal condition" of our culture has become one in which the ideology of the avant-garde wields a pervasive and often cynical authority over sizable portions of the very public it affects to despise. That it does so by means of a profitable alliance with the traditional antagonists of the avant-garde—the mass media, the universities, and the marketplace—only underscores the paradoxical nature of the situation in which we find ourselves. It is in the interest of this ideology to deny the scope of its present powers, of course. Its continuing effectiveness—its ability to come before the public not only as an arbiter of taste but as an example of moral heroism—is peculiarly dependent on the fiction of its extreme vulnerability. The myth of the underdog, of a struggle against impossible odds with little hope of recognition, is an indispensable instrument in the consolidation of avant-garde influence.*

HILTON KRAMER is Art News Editor of the New York *Times*. The present essay will form the introduction to his new book, *The Age of the Avant-Garde*, which is soon to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

* A perfect example of this myth in action is to be found in the symposium called "Art, Culture and Conservatism," in the Summer 1972 number of *Partisan Review*. Among its other contributions is an essay by Richard Gilman, entitled "The Idea of the Avant-Garde," in which the former literary editor of the *New Republic* and former drama critic for *Newsweek*, now a professor at Yale University and contributing editor to *Partisan Review*, defends the idea of "absolute art" ("Happenings . . . John Cage's music, Ad Reinhardt's Black paintings, Beckett's *How It Is*") as if this has not been one of the principal prestige items of our culture for as many years as he has been observing the scene, and as if his own highly visible career as a critic has not been associated with its phenomenal success. The question never raised in this essay, or elsewhere in the symposium, is this: Would Mr. Gilman have been invited to Yale, or to *Newsweek*, or *Partisan Review*, if he had set himself in vocal opposition to such "absolute art"? This is a case where a little autobiography would have been far more instructive than a solemn display of "disinterested" critical analysis.

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But this is only part of the myth that is fostered in the avant-garde scenario. Central to its doctrine of embattled and threatened virtue is the notion of what Lionel Trilling has called the avant-garde's "adversary" relation to the larger (bourgeois) culture in which it functions. If the institutions that now serve as conduits of avant-garde claims are no longer shy about acknowledging this adversary role, it is because the role itself has acquired an unquestioned historical prestige. We have all been brought up on the legend of avant-garde martyrdom, with its celebrated episodes of tardy vindication. Nothing is more familiar to us than the literature of cautionary tales recounting middle-class resistance to and stupidity about "advanced" artistic innovation. The history of modern art abounds in such tales, which are often chronicles of genuine suffering when they are not mere comedies of cultural manners. As a result, the tendency of modern critical thought, whether sympathetic to avant-garde objectives or openly hostile to them, has been to accept without question an essential, perhaps even a metaphysical, antagonism separating high culture from the middle class—an antagonism readily confirmed in our guilty feelings over the crowded roster of abused and misunderstood genius.

But these feelings are more and more at odds with our current experience. At a time when avant-garde claims are enthusiastically embraced by virtually all the institutions ministering to middle-class taste, the old pieties about what Trilling calls "the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention" of modernist art are clearly out of date. An accommodation has obviously been reached—an accommodation that makes nonsense of established notions of cultural warfare. We have, in fact, been witnessing a startling reversal of roles. The appetite for innovation is now voracious on the part of the new public for art, but it is more and more a source of impotence and despair among artists, who recognize that this volatile and often heartless taste for the "new" can be quite as destructive of any real attachment to the objects of the artistic imagination as the old philistine resistance ever was. It is now the artists who represent "tradition," if only the paradoxical tradition of the avant-garde, and the "informed" public that is likely to be quickly bored with what is established and familiar. Under the circumstances, we have ample reason to wonder what it is exactly that modernist art intended to subvert—to wonder what the once exacerbated relation of the avant-garde to the middle class has come to, and indeed, what it actually was in the epoch of its legendary conflicts.

I doubt if we can fully appreciate the fate that has overtaken the avant-garde in our own day without some drastic alteration in our understanding of the avant-garde as a historical phenomenon—without a clear understanding, first of all, that it *is* a historical phenomenon rather than an immutable fixture of cultural life. Contrary to the romance that encloses so much of its history for us, the avant-garde belongs ineluctably to the world of the middle class, and is barely conceivable in isolation from it. The avant-garde has been, from the start, a vital coefficient of bourgeois culture. Beginning as an avowal of the life of feeling that the defensive and insecure institutions of the middle class could not bring itself to acknowledge, lest its precarious hold on its own self-esteem be shattered, the avant-garde developed into the critical and increasingly combative conscience of bourgeois civilization. The cultural history of the bourgeoisie is the history of its gradual and painful adjustment to this conscience—an adjustment that made the bourgeoisie, despite its own worst inclinations, the moral and aesthetic beneficiary of the avant-garde's heroic labors.

It is not enough to see this fateful history, which is nothing less than the history of the effort to align the interests of high art with the realities of an industrial society governed by democratic principles, as a cartoon struggle between the enlightened and the unenlightened. The actual scenario is far more complicated than that. The bourgeoisie was, after all, the first truly "modern" class. Its headlong development of industrial technology into the dominant means of production, with everything this brought in the shift of power from the countryside to the cities, had a deeper and more permanent effect on the texture and the dynamics of modern life—on the "values" that impinge on experience—than art of any sort, whether avant-garde or *retardataire*, could possibly make claim to. Likewise its sponsorship of democratic institutions. In short, there is a "progressive" side to the bourgeois ethos—an impulse toward emancipation from outmoded social forms as well as from outmoded means of production—that is at least as significant as the "reactionary" side, though you would never dream of its existence from the caricature of bourgeois motives that emerges from the doctrinal literature of the avant-garde.

As FOR the avant-garde itself, its own history is anything but a single-minded tale of revolt against bourgeois values. Cocteau may have been exaggerating when he claimed that "The 'bourgeoisie' is the bed-rock of France from which all our artists emerge. They may possibly get clear of it, but it allows them to build dangerously on substantial foundations." ("With us," he wrote in *Cock and Harlequin*, "there is a house, a lamp, a plate of soup, a fire, wine and pipes at the back of every important work of art."*) But he was only exaggerat-

* In *A Call to Order*, translated by Rollo H. Myers (Henry Holt, 1925), p. 7.

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ing an essential part of the truth. The history of the avant-garde actually harbors a complex agenda of internal conflict and debate, not only about aesthetic matters but about the social values that govern them. If the bourgeois ethos may be said to have both a "progressive" and a "reactionary" side, the avant-garde is similarly divided. At one extreme, there is indeed an intransigent radicalism that categorically refuses to acknowledge the contingent and rather fragile character of the cultural enterprise, a radicalism that cancels all debts to the past in the pursuit of a new vision, however limited and fragmentary and circumscribed, and thus feels at liberty—in fact compelled—to sweep anything and everything in the path of its own immediate goals, whatever the consequences. It is from this radical extreme, of which Dada, I suppose, is the quintessential expression, that our romance of the avant-garde is largely derived. But the history of the avant-garde is by no means confined to these partisans of wholesale revolt. It also boasts its champions of harmony and tradition. It is actually among the latter that we are likely to find the most solid and enduring achievements of the modern era—among those tradition-haunted artists (Matisse and Picasso, Eliot and Yeats, Schoenberg and Stravinsky) who are mindful, above all, of the continuity of culture, and thus committed to the creative renewal of its deepest impulses.

This division between art conceived as a form of guerrilla warfare and art conceived as the reaffirmation of a vital tradition is by no means absolute. Many important artists—even such self-avowed Dadaists as Arp and Schwitters—identified their interests with the one camp while quietly enjoying the advantages of the other. And such a division is certainly no guide to the aesthetic quality of individual works of art. But it does describe the essential dialectic that governed the sensibilities of the avant-garde in the era of its greatest endeavors. That the custodians of bourgeois taste failed so miserably and for so long to distinguish between their genuine adversaries and their rightful allies is part of the historical tragedy of bourgeois culture. It is also part of its comedy. But neither the tragedy nor the comedy should mislead us about the actual course of the avant-garde enterprise, which in the 20th century—and even earlier—has been characterized by extreme dissensions in its own ranks.

These dissensions tended to increase, both in ferocity and effect, more or less in direct ratio to the turbulence of the political scene. The most celebrated avant-garde event of the relatively tranquil 90's—the raucous debut of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896—was at once a sensation and a prophecy, but it could scarcely be said to have stimulated a powerful new movement on the spot. Its consequences were delayed; the requisite political atmosphere had not yet ripened. What it prophesied—not only an assault on the audience, but an assault on art itself—was not to be fully realized until events outside the realm of art, namely the First World War and the political exacerbations that preceded it, removed certain inhibiting factors in its path. Until the advent of Futurism and Dada, in fact, Jarry's aesthetic nihilism remained buried in the subplot of the avant-garde scenario. The principal avant-garde action of the period—the main plot, if you will—was being prepared elsewhere, with no public attention to speak of, hence without scandal or violence, in the studios of Matisse and Picasso, who were working their way toward those fundamental revisions of established pictorial practice that proved to be the very basis of modernist painting in the 20th century.

THERE is indeed a sense in which all nihilist aesthetic programs are condemned by their very nature to remain confined to the subplot of vanguard history. Their protagonists may conduct guerrilla raids on the main body of artistic endeavor, as the Futurists and the Dadaists did in such spectacular fashion, acting out dreams of revenge and vindication *in response* to what the votaries of the most vital traditions have created, but the insurgents are themselves powerless to produce an art of the first importance without aligning their aspirations with these same traditions—an alignment that necessarily modifies their own intransigence. Those radical breaks with the past which constitute a recurrent claim in the literature of each successive avant-garde group and which, so far as the public is concerned, may be said to embody the essence of what the avant-garde is understood to be doing—such breaks, it seems, are easier to formulate than to implement. In theory, the break may sound complete (and it is usually theory that prominently assists in generating an avant-garde myth); in the studio, it rarely turns out that way.

The Futurists, for example, despite their cry of "courage, audacity, and revolt" and their confident assertion that "Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown," were obliged to retrace the course of painting step by step from post-Impressionism to Fauvism and Expressionism to Cubism in order to produce an art of their own—an art that, in the end, added only a marginal increment to the monumental achievements of the Cubists. Artistically the Futurists lived off the practices—the traditions and piecemeal revisions—their ideology loudly condemned. (Apollinaire was the first to point out—in 1912—that "They declare themselves to be 'absolutely opposed' to the art of the avant-garde French schools, yet at this point, they are noth-

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ing but imitators of those schools.") This was the case even where Futurist pronouncements promised genuine innovations of great consequence. Boccioni's call, in his 1912 manifesto on sculpture, for the use of "transparent planes, glass, sheets of metal, wires, external and internal electric lights," and other new materials, went unheeded by the artist himself. The first "Futurist Manifesto" of 1909 had proclaimed that "a roaring motor car . . . is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*," but three years later, when Boccioni approached the sculptural task of making a striding figure he called *Synthesis of Human Dynamism*, "He seems to have in mind," one of his recent (and highly sympathetic) commentators tells us, "the example of the *Victory of Samothrace* (of which there was a cast in the Brera), as well as Rodin's *Balzac*, *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, and Mestrovic's or Bourdelle's bulgingly-muscled males."* Even the greatest of Boccioni's sculptures—the figure called *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913)—reflects this classical inheritance and leaves the traditional notion of a unity of materials undisturbed. In the studio, Boccioni too was engaged in revising a tradition.

The genius of Futurism, as of many subsequent movements of aesthetic revolt, lay less in the realm of artistic innovation (which tended to remain in the hands of artists who were politically less *engagé*) than in the realm of ideology. The Futurists correctly perceived that only a profound social upheaval could produce conditions favorable to their cherished dream of establishing a new civilization based on violence, heroism, technology, national pride, and, as Marinetti put it in 1923, "the coming to power of the young in opposition to the parliamentary, bureaucratic, academic, and pessimistic spirit." Hence the glorification of war ("the only cure for the world," according to Marinetti) as the crucible in which the authority of the past could be decisively defeated. Hence, too, the incessant cry for novelty and speed, and for its inevitable corollary, the destruction of institutions—libraries, museums, academies, etc.—whose function it is to uphold the glories of the past.

THAT the ideology—though not necessarily the art—of the Futurists led directly to Fascism has long been recognized. (Art, after all, has a more equivocal influence.) "For anyone who has a sense of historical connections," wrote Croce in 1924, "the ideological origins of Fascism can be found in Futurism, in the determination to go down into the streets, to impose their own opinions, to stop the mouths of those who disagree, not to fear riots or fights, in this eagerness to break with all traditions, in this exaltation of youth which was characteristic of Futurism. . . ."† Yet Marinetti was telling the truth—part of the truth, anyway—when he declared that "Futurism is a movement that is strictly artistic and ideological. It intervenes in political struggles only in hours of grave danger for the nation." For what the Futurists failed to perceive was the contingent and suicidal nature of their own impulse—the impulse to politicize aesthetics and to make politics itself a realm of aesthetic gratification.

The fact is, it was first the war (which it heralded) and then the victory of Fascism (which it abetted) that destroyed Futurism as a movement. It belonged, after all, to the world it despised, the world of the bourgeoisie, and could survive in no other. With Italy at war or with the Fascists in power, any further *soirées futuristes*—the object of which was to provoke a riot in the audience—were unthinkable. Violence no longer belonged to the realm of aesthetics; it had passed into the hands of bureaucracy. The prerogatives of *Ubu* were now the possession of *Il Duce*.

The line, then, from the premiere of Jarry's play to the *soirées futuristes* to the March on Rome is fairly clear—a line that traces "the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention" of the avant-garde in its purest political form. But this line of nihilist intent, though undeniably fateful in its historical consequences, was only one term in the dialectic of the avant-garde endeavor, and artistically it was rarely, if ever, the stronger term. The more creative, countervailing impulse cleaved to quite different values, and foremost among them was a virtual obsession with the past—with the museum, which the Futurists wished to destroy, and the extension of certain traditions, which the Futurist painters and sculptors were obliged to observe despite their protestations to the contrary. The same year that witnessed *Ubu*'s debut saw the twenty-seven-year-old Henri Matisse painting *La grotte*, a painstaking rehearsal of one of Courbet's favorite themes. (Years later, when he could afford it, Matisse acquired one of Courbet's masterpieces on this theme, thus reaffirming an abiding affinity.) The next year, 1897, the sixteen-year-old Pablo Picasso, already a precocious bohemian, was writing to a friend about his admiration for El Greco, Van Dyck, Rubens, and Velasquez. The young artist promptly produced in a painting called *Nana* an accomplished post-Impressionist "reply" (as one critic has called it) to the powerful figure of the dwarf in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, the 17th-century masterpiece that, decades later, was but one of several classic works Picasso was to paint an elaborate series of variations on. (Another was Courbet's *Demoiselles de la Seine*.) Neither painter had yet produced the work that would, within the coming decade, establish him as a leader of

* *Futurist Art and Theory, 1909-1915*, by Marianne W. Martin (Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 166.

† Quoted in James Joll's excellent essay, "F. T. Marinetti: Futurism and Fascism," in *Intellectuals in Politics* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), p. 143.

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the avant-garde; both were engaged in mastering a tradition—a tradition from which they were soon able to wrest their respective innovations, and which they never really abandoned.* The point not to be mistaken is that these historic innovations, from which nearly everything we most value in the art of the 20th century has been derived, represented in their own eyes no essential rupture with the classic works that have nourished them. Their most radical efforts were, indeed, the only way these new masters could keep faith with their classic inheritance. The past had to be absorbed before it could be seriously extended and added to. It had to be *felt* if any really new emotion were to be distinguished from it and given a new form. Writing about Matisse on another occasion, I suggested that he was intent in these early years on "testing the ground in every direction, copying the Old Masters. . .assaying Impressionist color and a post-Impressionist facture, zigzagging his way from the pieties of tradition to the innovations of the avant-garde and back again. . . ."† It was precisely through such zigzag methods, audacity alternating with acts of *hommage*, that Matisse and Picasso created a body of work that changed the face of modern art—work bold enough to inspire and resourceful enough to nourish buccaneers like the Futurists and yet sufficiently strong and durable to withstand their wholesale borrowings and vulgarizations. Sufficiently resourceful, too, to support the innovations of Dada, Constructivism, and the entire history of abstraction from its earliest exponents to its latest epigoni.

THUS, the impulse to act as the creative conscience of a usable tradition was as much a part of the avant-garde scenario—it was indeed, as I have suggested, its main plot—as the impulse to wage war on the past, and the artists who aligned their ambition with this tradition-oriented function faced an infinitely subtler and more difficult task. For "tradition" already had its official guardians, who, armed with an elaborate system of sanctions, were determined to resist any change that required them to reconsider the precious inheritance in their charge. But a constant reconsideration and revaluation of the past is precisely what the master artists of the avant-garde were forcing upon the official guardians of taste, and doing so not out of any conscious determination to "subvert" tradition but, on the contrary, to rescue it from moribund conventions and redefine it in the most vital terms—terms that spoke directly to the sensibility of the age. That this effort to place tradition under the pressure of a constant revaluation had an unexpected effect, that it resulted, in the end, in the virtual dissolution of any really viable concept of tradition, is, of course, at the heart of the situation in which we find ourselves today. Without the bulwark of a fixed tradition, the avant-garde finds itself deprived of its historic antagonist. Much to its own embarrassment, it finds that it has itself become tradition. With its victory over the authority of the past complete, its own *raison d'être* has disappeared, and it has in fact ceased to exist except as an imaginary enterprise engaged in combat against imaginary adversaries.

The classic statement of the avant-garde view of tradition is to be found in T. S. Eliot's essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published in 1919. It is worth turning to the famous passages again in which the author of "Prufrock," himself a leader of the literary avant-garde, sets out to defend the concept of tradition against the easy contempt of the avant-garde as well as the sterile assumptions of the academy—to make it, in fact, a foundation of the highest artistic accomplishment. In what I take to be a reference to the critical practice of the avant-garde, Eliot notes a "tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else." He goes on:

> In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.

But there is, Eliot insists, another and more comprehensive way of looking at the poet's work:

> . . . if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Eliot is at pains in this essay to distinguish this concept of tradition from the practice of "following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes"; "novelty," he agrees, "is better than repetition." But he firmly rejects this false choice, which, by 1919, in the heyday of Dada and Constructivism, had become the motto of every new vanguard movement. "Tradition," he writes,

> is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place,

* "Mallarmé is an innovator in one way," wrote Paul Valéry, "Rimbaud in another. And the remainder in each is not new, but traditional." In *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, translated by Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 372.

† "Matisse in Paris," *New York Review of Books*, October 8, 1970.

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> the historical sense . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

Eliot then goes on to assert a principle of the greatest importance to the art of the modern age. "No poet, no artist of any art," he declares,

> has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism . . . [for] what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.

The aesthetic principle upheld in this essay thus placed tradition at the very center of artistic consciousness, in an intimate, symbiotic relation to the innovative function in art. This is indeed how tradition had come to be subsumed in the work of the greatest avant-garde masters, and it was, too, the way it passed, unacknowledged, into the work of the Futurists, the Dadaists, and other doctrinaire exponents of the radical impulse. But Eliot's conception of tradition—tradition as it was reconceived by the avant-garde—was not the "tradition" of the official custodians of bourgeois culture. *Their* tradition was something assumed to be fixed and immutable, a barrier against novelty and change. (Or so they often claimed. In actual fact, change was cautiously admitted so long as its pace could be slowed to a barely visible trickle and its disruptive effect thereby nullified.) In revealing this static notion of tradition to be a sham, a tissue of pieties that no longer corresponded to anything real either in the past or in the present, the avant-garde was bound to incur the wrath of precisely that segment of society that had the most to fear from disruptive changes of any sort. Its resistance to this more volatile and uncontrollable conception of what tradition might be was nothing less than an attempt to isolate the realm of culture from the remorseless flux that had overtaken life in virtually every other respect—and, ironically, had done so as a direct consequence of the democratization and industrialization the bourgeoisie had itself pioneered. It was nothing less than an attempt to preserve culture in something like its former relation to power which, in aristocratic, monarchist, and theocratic societies, was a relation understood to be ornamental, functional, flattering, and morally supportive.

This legendary resistance, from which the myth of the avant-garde still draws so much energy, was often stupid. It was often cruel. It caused considerable suffering, and its basic assumption—that culture could somehow be held in a timeless reserve, quarantined from the pressures of new experience and new emotions—was completely illusory. It was, moreover, undeniably indifferent, indeed hostile, to the very standards of excellence it purported to uphold. But it cannot be denied that what was being resisted was something fundamental—a historic alteration in the relation of culture to power. Henceforth—so the avant-garde was, in effect, declaring—culture would no longer be answerable to power, it would no longer serve an ornamental function, it would no longer flatter and dissimulate in order to survive and prosper. It, too, would demand to be free—free to exercise the democratic option implicit in the bourgeois ethos and explicitly guaranteed in the bourgeois polity. The bourgeoisie thus became the first ruling class in history—I, at least, know of no precedent—to suffer the loss, the alienation, as we say, of its highest cultural constituency.

To what, we may ask, does it owe this catastrophic distinction? To its stupidity? Its cruelty? To its philistine illusions and its well-known failures of sensibility? Not, in my opinion, primarily. In my reading of history, the bourgeoisie does not have a patent on these (or any other) moral or aesthetic deficiencies. The fact is, the middle class enforced even the worst of its own prejudices with a lighter and a more diffident hand than other classes in power. No, it owed this fateful distinction to its most conspicuous virtue—to its liberalism, to its commitment to the principle of freedom and dissent, to its refusal to tyrannize or terrorize its own opposition. However distasteful it may have found the expression of that dissent, however alarmed it became in the face of the cultural forces arrayed against it, however panic-stricken it occasionally was in responding to them, bourgeois society remained more or less loyal to its liberalism. And to that liberalism, which the avant-garde so often mocked and despised, the avant-garde owed its very existence. Only where bourgeois liberalism itself was destroyed—not infrequently, with a little help from the avant-garde—did the avant-garde suffer a brutal and enforced demise.

WHERE bourgeois liberalism prospered, or at least survived, the avant-garde was free to pursue its headlong

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course of revision and revolt. To the *révoltés* there always accrued the greater share of publicity and a more immediate response. (Apollinaire noted, in 1912, that whereas the Futurists were "doing very nicely financially," the Cubists were "abandoned by all, ridiculed by practically every art critic, and living at best in semi-poverty, at worst in the most abject poverty."* The Surrealists were to enjoy a similar advantage while Mondrian was being ignored.) An abrupt break with the past, real or imagined, was somehow more encompassable than a far-reaching revision or extension of it. But it was the artists engaged in the work of revision—in the work of transforming the artistic inheritance rather than obliterating it—who ultimately effected the profoundest changes, for it was they who altered irrevocably our sense of the past; it was they who liquidated its authority in the very process of harnessing its energies. The application of what Eliot called "the historical sense" to the immediate tasks of artistic innovation had the effect—unanticipated, for the most part, by the artists who pioneered the effort—of making the past permanently hostage to the pressures of the present. History was removed from its familiar hinges, and its myriad discrete episodes laid out, museum-fashion, in a way that left them neutralized and inert to anything but an aggressive principle of selection. For what was Eliot's notion of "an ideal order" of the "existing monuments" of art but a museum condemned to perpetual modification "by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them"? The "simultaneous existence and . . . simultaneous order" that Eliot claimed for the whole of the literature of the past and present effectively cancelled whatever intrinsic authority the past might enjoy. All authority was now to be extrinsically invested in the imperatives of the moment. Everything now was subject to the tests of immediate creative utility even as such tests were becoming increasingly arbitrary and irresponsible.

It is no accident, then, that the museum has emerged as the representative institution of the age of the avant-garde, succeeding the academy as the principal repository of whatever standards may be said to survive. For the museum, as it has evolved under the pressures of modernism, is founded on a principle of dynamism, a principle designed to keep the past under constant surveillance and revision, whereas the academy is based on a principle of stability. For the academy, history remains a hierarchy of fixed positions and "eternal" values against which the new can be measured and judged—and, if necessary, rejected. For the museum, history is fluid, without fixed boundaries, a medium of unremitting but fecund tension between past and present, subject only to what the "individual talent" deems most vital to its immediate interests. Admission of the new can be delayed, if only because claimants to the office are so manifold, but cannot be resisted on principle. In the academy, the new is admitted to a line of succession; it is accepted as a historical increment to an ongoing enterprise, which it is expected to enhance and strengthen but leave essentially unchanged; whereas in the museum the new is pitted against the inherited order in a test of strength, and strength is judged on the extent of the change it effects. In the academy, tradition can be transmitted; in the museum, it may be acquired, but only as one option among many.

ELIOT's tradition, alas, is finally a little like Tolstoy's God—it is the name of his desire. It is certainly not the bastion against novelty and anarchy he envisioned. (Perhaps that is why, when he came to adumbrate his general theory of culture, he recoiled from the implications of what, in practice, could only be a highly solipsistic conception of tradition. The hierarchical structure of an imaginary "Christian society" had to be invoked as a control against free-thinking applications of the unruly "historical sense.") The "tradition" of the avant-garde turned out to be something not really transmissible *as* tradition, after all. What was transmissible was not a "tradition" but a principle of artistic coherence, gleaned from the work itself, that might be applied to any tradition, or to none, as the artist wished. For the roots of this "tradition," if we can still call it that, were no longer in the general culture but in the personal culture of the "individual talent," and this personal culture—precisely because it could only be acquired at "great labor"—could easily be by-passed in favor of those properties of "style" to which a later generation of artists swiftly reduced all artistic inheritances.

It was not the traditions subsumed in *Ulysses* and the *Cantos* that were usable to the writers who placed themselves in the line of succession to Joyce and Pound, but something else—a compulsion toward the fragmentation and atomization of language that was felt (correctly, I think) to contain their stylistic essence. Similarly, it was not primarily the ways in which Picasso and Matisse "used," say, Courbet or Cézanne in their art that proved transmissible to the artists who followed them but, on the contrary, the force with which they showed this inheritance to be expendable. Picasso's Cubism may retain its blood ties to Cézanne, whereas a "readymade" by Duchamp, although it takes its cue from Cubist construction, deliberately orphans itself from the tradition in which it has its genesis. Picasso's art may still cleave to the museum ambience while Duchamp's deliberately repudiates it. But given

* *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, edited by LeRoy C. Breunig (Viking, 1972), p. 256.

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the dynamics of modernism, where only consequences count, this difference proves to be nugatory. For Picasso prepares the way for Duchamp, and Duchamp's art has nowhere to go except to the museum, where its presence does indeed modify the "existing monuments" in a way Eliot had not foreseen. It deprives them—and us—of their essential seriousness. Duchamp's legendary assault on the work of art as traditionally conceived effectively demonstrates that there is no such thing as an object or a gesture that, within the magical museum context, cannot be experienced as art, and this demonstration has the effect of consigning both the idea of tradition and the museum itself to a limbo of arbitrary choices and gratuitous assertions. Which is exactly what our culture has now become.

IF, THEN, the age of the avant-garde can definitely be said to have passed, as I believe it can, it is not because the will to innovation has abated its course—it has, if anything, accelerated its pace and grown more desperate—but because it no longer has any radical functions to perform. The avant-garde's historic antagonist, the bourgeoisie, has been dispossessed of all its traditions—dispossessed, above all, of its faith in the idea of tradition—and now lies supine and demoralized, awaiting the next scheduled rape of its sensibilities with that mixture of dread, curiosity, and bemused resignation befitting an organism no longer in control of its own habitat.

And what of the forces that now claim to speak in the name of the avant-garde—what are we to call them? Only they are any longer in a position to invoke the pieties of a tradition. Only they can now be said to constitute something resembling an academy in the hurly-burly of the current scene. Only they are permitted to cite precedents, establish prohibitions, lay down laws, and generally behave as if there were definite rules to be followed and prescribed aims to be achieved. The will to innovation has been triumphantly institutionalized, and the inherited order—part reality, part fiction, that it was—disestablished, sent spinning, Futurist-style, into fragments we shall be a long, long time recovering and reassembling into meaningful shapes. These shapes are no more likely to be exact replications of the past than such labors of reconstruction ever are. History will have had its way with them, as history always does. But recover them we must. For the new academy of innovation, which is what the museum culture of the avant-garde has come to be, is no more able than other academies to encompass the pressures of new experience; it can only satisfy an existing taste, and minister to an empty prejudice. And the pressures of new experience—above all, the unremitting experience of the new—now point in another direction entirely, toward renegotiating our pact with the past and reexamining all those restrictive clauses that have so often rendered our commerce with "tradition" simply foolish and parochial. And this means, first of all, reexamining the great epoch of the avant-garde itself, for this is today the only part of the past that still enjoys an exemption from the critical exercise of the historical sense. The task of criticism today is, in large part, an archeological task—the task of digging out a lost civilization from the debris that has swamped and buried it.

In the poem I have quoted at the opening of this essay, Wallace Stevens wrote:

One man opposing a society
If properly misunderstood becomes a myth.
I fear the understanding.

So once did we all, but history—the history of the avant-garde—has now clearly demonstrated that we have more to fear from the myth than from the understanding.

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Getting Out of Russia

Lev Navrozov

THE ANSWERS GIVEN AT A REFUGEE CENTER IN EUROPE BY ONE OF THOSE WHO LEFT RUSSIA IN OCTOBER 1971.

QUESTION: *How difficult is it now to get out of Russia?*

ANSWER: To be fair to those in power in Russia at present, please recall that, had I been suspected before 1953 of my desire to leave Russia, I would have perished in some prison camp within about eight years on the average (though in the collective scramble for survival I was always far below the average—even in kindergarten I was the last to get my share of boiled water).

The Soviet man was born into paradise. It was a shoddy kind of paradise, something like a carnival sideshow, jerry-built in a drab, miserable, hungry town. Still, it was a metaphysical absurdity to ask: "What if one wants to leave paradise?" If such a morbid fancy originated in the mind of a paradise-dweller, it simply showed that he was not a paradise-dweller at all but a spy, as described in those trashy spy novels turned out in quantity by (as the photograph indicated) a hack with the fat, oily face of an aging boy. At school we read about a spy named Trotsky so villainous that capital punishment seemed inadequate in his case and so he was *banished*. However, this retribution was so inhuman that it had never been applied since (as our small, slovenly schoolmarm reassured us).

The sociological difference between the pre- and post-1953 eras may seem to you old stuff, and I suppose bulky volumes have been written on the subject, but unless I spend two minutes of your time on its briefest description, the discussion of any problem in Russia is pointless.

The Latin noun *crimen* never took hold in Russia; instead, the medieval ecclesiastical equivalent of the English "trespass" is used. Trespasses can roughly be divided into criminal (that is, considered by those in power harmful to the common people and hence to themselves) and political (that is, considered by those in power harmful directly to themselves and their power). Before 1953 criminal trespasses were dealt with by what was, essentially, the Russian pre-1861 judicial-penitentiary system. On the other hand, the concept of the political trespass, as an *act*, had not yet been arrived at.

The pre-1953 approach can be summed up as follows. Everyone behaved between 1937 and 1953 as though he were "infinitely devoted" (to use the official phrase) to those in power. However, the entire population could not be infinitely devoted in exactly the same degree. A fraction of it was (secretly) devoted not so infinitely as the rest. It was up to the "organs of state security" to keep exposing and liquidating that fraction on the strength of surveillance data, and/or intuition, and/or material evidence, and/or confessions under torture, and/or voluntary denunciations (or decisions from above, of course). Just who would liquidate whom (in cases of head-on denunciation, for example) was decided by an interplay of the will and status of those manning the "organs of state security" at the moment versus each denounced denouncer.

After 1953 some defects of this approach, making it detrimental to those in power, were grasped, and there evolved, in the post-1953 era, the concept of the political trespass as a specific act involving the furnishing of proof that would hold up under official inspection. The perpetration of a trespass having been proved, the trespasser is then arrested and may be kept incommunicado for six months or longer, though his confession is not indispensable. Next the case is passed to the court (consisting of an official, subordinate to a certain level of the hierarchy, who keeps no shorthand records). This functionary examines the proofs (secretly, though the trespasser's relatives are admitted sometimes, as is a special "classified" lawyer) and hands down a sentence in accordance with the political articles contained in the general criminal code. One should not, however, equate these procedures

LEV NAVROZOV, born in Moscow in 1928, left Russia in the latest wave of Jewish emigration and is now living in New York. He is the author of several unpublished works in Russian which have attracted considerable underground attention in his native country; he has also translated some of the major Russian authors into English. Mr. Navrozov is currently at work on a book to be published by Harper's Magazine Press. The present essay, written by Mr. Navrozov in English, is his first publication in the United States.

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with penal procedures elsewhere merely because they employ the same terminology. A sentence of fifteen days of imprisonment in Russia may turn out to be worse (in particular, for the convict's health) than fifteen years of imprisonment of the kind to which, say, Trotsky's assassin was subjected in Mexico. After several years of "deprivation of freedom," one is usually released to die or to be an invalid for life (typically suffering from some abominable food-deficiency disease) unless one is an especially tough character.

To sum up, a basically similar procedure is now in operation with respect to both political and criminal trespasses.

Q. *If a certain procedure has been established, as you say it has, and political trespassers can be put into prison on the basis of this procedure, why should they be put into psychiatric asylums, for example?*

A. If you recall, between 1937 and 1953 it was declared that not just democracy but super-democracy had been established in the country, and this is still the official fiction. Now, suppose a citizen has typed and distributed in six copies his opinion that there is no freedom of the press in Russia. If he is put on trial for slander, the trial will get resounding publicity all over the world. Therefore, those in power tend to hold few public trials, only as many as they feel necessary for intimidation. Instead, an official called a psychiatrist may place the trespasser under psychiatric "treatment" (which before 1953 was often an act of clemency but is usually the worse alternative nowadays). The same is also done if he has a previous psychiatric record of any kind. (I myself was expecting a psychiatric denunciation at one point in my career and went to a psychiatrist I knew to prepare the best official case-history possible. Everything about me turned out to be psychically abnormal even from the point of view of unbiased, average-level Soviet psychiatry. A recluse. Writing away at something useless all his life. Always saying wild things, with that unhealthy kind of agitation. "The fact that they call you in that reference 'the only person since Joseph Conrad—' is the worst," the psychiatrist said. "Never show references like that. Let them say simply about you: 'Copes well with the work entrusted to him.' ")

It should be borne in mind that the aim of the post-1953 approach is to prevent "arbitrariness" at any level below the very top. Accordingly, to avoid the responsibility for decision-making an official tends to push the case up the hierarchy. The top decision, of course, is bound by nothing but personal will. An official may get a decision from above, for example, ordering reprisals against all members of a certain group, and these reprisals he will carry out, no matter how large the group is or how unusual the reprisals are, since the responsibility will not be his.

So far as the problem of leaving Russia goes, an applicant for a visa to leave the country in order to join his relatives does not commit any political trespass, but he has no chance of being let out unless his relative is a "close relation" who did not leave Russia without official permission after 1917, etc. If he applies for motives other than joining his relatives, such as his preference for some aspect of life in other countries, he is committing a political trespass, for he is slandering that particular aspect of life in Russia and hence undermining the authority of those in power and setting a bad example for a practically unlimited number of inhabitants.

A year ago, to apply for a visa to join a relative in Israel was at least as bad as applying for a visa to go elsewhere for motives other than joining a relative. Last spring it all turned around. Moscow witnessed an event which had had no precedent since the 20's: several applicants for Israel (and no other country!) were let out though their relatives in Israel were *not* "close relations"!

Q. *How did it feel, leaving?*

A. When we used to go see our predecessors off, we would watch them pass through a huge sliding door at the airport. As its two sections closed behind them forever I would recall T. S. Eliot's line about birth looking like death, because this departure resembled some burial rite, except that it was vertical, so to speak, not horizontal. The Soviet man would disappear. Was it a new birth? For the people this side of the door the question was theological; for them he disappeared from this world forever. With our family it was more earthy. They hugged us, weeping. I was leaving them there to struggle on their own, though it was also to them that I owed my release—but the consolation was that here I could also pay my debt in kind.

Q. *Who and what were you in Russia?*

A. On my mother's side there were about twenty-four generations of rabbis, but my mother and her brothers and sisters received a Russian education (though my uncle, later a prominent psychiatrist, had to go to the Sorbonne). They were all in love with Russian culture, and my mother married a Russian with everything Russian about him, including prodigious drinking bouts. Her life was hell, but as I learned later from stray letters she was deliriously happy, for surely she had not wanted to marry a philistine! Surely she had wanted to marry a man out of a Russian novel! And here he was, by God's impossible mercy.

Russian culture was finished off by 1934, with the closing of the last non-state publishing house, and other similar measures. But its creative figures did not yet want to die, and though deprived of printing presses they rhapsodized among themselves with all the extravagance of

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the Russian bohemian, always ready to exchange immortal fame (not to mention lesser values) for what my father called an "interesting conversation." Many of these conversations took place in my presence.

My father volunteered as a common soldier and was killed in 1941. Evidently my childhood memories led me, a wartime slum adolescent, to take out some of the forbidden and forgotten time-yellowed books he had left and read them again till the mysteries contained in their quaint print became my own. Now apart from my "official" life, I led my own life of lonely exaltation in *real* Russia (that country which had presumably existed before 1917) and in Europe —ah, *Evropa!*—as seen through the Russian intellectual's eye at the turn of the century.

Q. *But excuse me: at what age did you first become aware of this split?*

A. Before nine and after thirteen, children, or at least boys, seem to be more sensitive to matters of the spirit while in the interim they tend to be narrowly rationalistic (preoccupied with mechanics, computation, etc.). Between nine and thirteen we, that is, my friends and I, learned to criticize more and more competently the glaring irrationalism of everything called "Soviet." To begin with, there was the word "Soviet" itself, an ordinary Russian word meaning "council" (specifically, the local council of self-government), which was the very thing that had been turned into fiction by "Soviet" power.

Q. *But how could you speak so freely in those years?*

A. You could speak perfectly freely with your trusted friends. I always did. Of course, once you took the wrong person for your trusted friend you were lost. But we never did. After some conditioning a lab assistant will never mistake strychnine for starch or sugar. As soon as there was a sign that your companion was not intelligent, congenial, or natural enough, you cut him adrift imperceptibly and automatically, as a kind of defensive reflex conditioned from early childhood, indeed transmitted by your elders. I doubt that even a highly competent *agent provocateur* could have tricked us into confiding in him.

Q. *Wasn't it rather precocious—to be able to grasp what some leading intellectuals of Continental Europe could not understand?*

A. You mean what some leading intellectuals did not want to understand. In order to understand something you must be free of motives that encourage you not to understand it, as William James showed long ago. If such motives are very strong, you may die still not understanding that two times two makes four. You may not know it after a lifetime at the Sorbonne.

All my friends between the ages of nine and thirteen were rationalistic critics. Among writers' children those who were not sufficiently intelligent in this respect were called "degenerates" (the truth of the matter was that they had read fewer "Soviet" books). This was merely the reaction of inquisitive, rational minds to a tangle of self-contradictory platitudes that claimed to represent perfect logic, to an irrational make-believe that called itself the science of sciences.

MY DEEPER revulsion began to grow in mid-adolescence, and was very soon fanned into an infinite abhorrence for everything "Soviet" by the coercive persuasion aimed at "rearing our Soviet people in the spirit of infinite love for everything Soviet."

The Russian language has a word no other language seems to have: *poshlost.* Literally, it means something that has already gone into spiritual circulation—"gone-into-ness"—and combines the concepts of banality, phoniness, affectation, stiltedness, ritualism, triteness, depersonalization, coarseness, conformity, conventionality, routine, vulgarity, pretension, etc. Chekhov brought the Russian intellectual's revulsion for *poshlost* to a point where one of his characters shoots his fellow passenger on a train because the latter has said something "one says in such cases."

Now why in God's name did it have to be the Russian intelligentsia that was fated to sit through thousands upon thousands of performances of plays—and at a place still called "*Chekhov's* Moscow Art Theater"—every participant in which would have been shot by Chekhov's character long before the first rehearsal? For what *is* all this talk of "lofty goals," "world-historic gains," and "epoch-making achievements" but horrible *poshlost?* These plays were written, produced, and directed by a gigantic industry dedicated to nothing but "gone-into-ness" and aimed at engaging the entire country in the mindless repetition of *poshlost.*

Q. *Did you try to get out at that time?*

A. No. There was my mother. I could not escape with her, and if I had escaped without her, the "close relatives" of "enemies of the people" were always persecuted. Besides, I had already emigrated internally into the exquisite visions of pre-1917 Russia and *Evropa.* And, therefore, to tell you the truth, I was intensely happy, though in an uneven way. Of course, I was sure I would see Europe some day. As is typical of a teen-ager, the present was "something for the time being," with the vista of real life still in the future.

Q. *What was your notion of the outside world at that time?*

A. Yes, that might interest you, in fact, because it is still the notion of many educated people confined within Russia physically or spiritually.

Since culture in Russia has been dispersed into tiny islets, in the 50's it was hardly even at the level it had reached before the suppression of the early 30's, or at the turn of the century for that matter. The modern outside world was

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to me, accordingly, German philosophy from Kant to Spengler (Bergson being a non-German exception), German music (Chopin a non-German exception), and French painting. However, while appreciating "austere German genius" and "lucid Gallic wit," the traditional Russian intellectual conceived of Germans and French as vaudeville types, and a nobleman's knowledge of French and German did not prevent even Tolstoy from representing them as such, thus showing the reader once again that only the Russian has a *soul*. Even after the cultural elite migrated to France and Germany after 1917, many Russian intellectuals never rid themselves of these vaudeville images. Besides, they believed that Western (meaning French and German) culture was turning apocalyptically into what Spengler called "civilization," something "scientifically" soulless, cynical, lifeless (not unlike Huxley's brave new world).

Few Russian émigrés strayed to Britain. While the vaudeville German was an absurd pedant, ridiculously good-natured unless he was idiotically cruel, and the vaudeville Frenchman was vain, suave, sensuous, and superficial, the "English" were boring, cretinous clowns (this is traceable to Dickens, the only English author extensively read in Russia for a whole century and mistaken for a realist in the Russian tradition).

As for the United States, a Russian writer who, to be paradoxical, "admired Americanism" wrote (during his tour of the country): "The American will not greet you with our indifferent 'Good morning,' but will say instead his energetic 'Make money?'" Lowbrows in Russia liked their "America" (jazz, chewing gum, movies, etc.) and the more they liked it the more this "America" appalled intellectuals. Not in Russia alone, it seems. A French architect's wife asked me huffily in Moscow in 1964: "What do you need a mastery of English for? You are not a businessman or engineer. You are a man of *culture*."

Q. *How long did you persist in your visions?*

A. I could not persist in them beyond my adolescence. I realized that in the society in which I was born I would never be able to be an adult, a citizen. I was looking for a way out, for a link with reality, for a return to the present.

I knew that from 1861 to 1917 Russia had been developing along the lines of the Western democratic countries, except that they had weathered a certain critical stage while Russia had collapsed. I also knew that the birthplace of democracy in this millennium was England, and so at the age of twenty I began to study England, including her language.

My studies enabled me to break through the traditional Russian imagery to the realities of English-speaking civilization, and now I saw Russia, too, and, indeed, all of Continental European culture as no Russian can see them so long as he is confined spiritually within the Continental-European cultural complex.

Q. *But how did you exist officially all these years?*

A. Well, to avoid military service (so "Soviet" at its worst) I joined an Institute, then reenrolled in a secondary school to get another diploma, then joined another Institute while still registered at the first. I did not attend the second Institute (of Foreign Languages) either, but my showing on exams was so good that it would have been awkward for them to expel me. A routine of elaborate safety techniques: have trusted friends, but avoid all impersonal groups; never be conspicuous; never join the Young Communist League if fewer than half the students are members, and never hesitate to join it if all of them except you are. And so on.

Quite likely, it was a trickier kind of existence than that led in Western Europe, say, by a Russian military-intelligence agent. The latter's purpose is to trick the authorities and get involved as much as possible, while those who wanted to preserve their spiritual selves in Russia had to use perhaps greater ingenuity and run greater hazards to *avoid* involvement. After 1953, however, a new hope emerged. It became worthwhile to wait and see how history would work out in the end.

BEGUN as a totally impractical search for spiritual salvation, my esoteric pursuits turned out to be more practical than the most utilitarian of occupations: I could do English translations of Russian literature (Dostoevsky, Herzen, Prishvin) as well as works on econometrics and other abstruse subjects, and thus I could work very little and still keep a devoted family going, or work at a furious pace and earn a great deal by Soviet standards.

One result was that having spurned any rank, membership, or official status, I nevertheless became one of the country's more prosperous people. I could marry because money after 1953 insured a way of life far removed from "Soviet" collective realities. In particular, I moved with my wife and son into a country-house with a three-acre grove of birch trees, combining the images of a European mansion and a Russian estate (and a fantastic luxury by Soviet standards).

Another result was that for at least eight years I worked for a living three days a month on the average and devoted the rest of my time to my book, *The Development of Civic Society from Chieftainism*, subtitled "How Those in Power in Russia Can Keep in Power by Developing It."

I started it in 1956, on the day of the suppression of the Hungarian uprising.

Q. *A coincidence?*

A. No. Though my studies in English civilization had led me far away from my Russian

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(German-French) complex, there was still lurking somewhere at the periphery of my mind the assumption that mankind was divided into aristocrats of spirit (whom Tolstoyan peasant sages and saints somehow adjoined) and philistines. More than 99 per cent of mankind I believed were philistines who if brought up under the proper coercive regimen could be made to sing every morning, like the doctor's family in the next room to ours in Moscow, "'cause one is so young, 'cause one is so young in our beautiful, beautiful land."

Now it became clear that more than 99 per cent of Hungary's population were by no means philistines, nor had they been transformed by coercion into Orwellian proles. They did not, upon awakening, strike up Young Communist League songs in a cheerful family chorus. On the contrary. So my still lingering assumption that only the select few could successfully resist such coercion certainly did not apply to the population west of the Bug river. Even with respect to Russia, stranded as I was on my own tiny spiritual islet, I must have underestimated the number of spiritual survivors in a society split by terror into isolated knots of close friends.

Q. *Would you now please return to your life in Russia?*

A. Apart from my studies, my other internal émigré's pursuits included imaginative writing—narratives, as I called them, since I hated the word "novel" or "short story." Our family lived within three acres, isolated from the world. My son did not attend school (he simply took his eighth-year exams four years ahead of his age), neither my wife nor I was attached to any specific organization, and to all intents and purposes we might as well have been marooned on a lonely desert island, except for visits from our few friends.

When the Prague Spring was at its height, a delegation of Czechoslovak intellectuals was shown about the publishing houses in Moscow. The visitors—who were to be pleased at all costs—heaped scorn on all the new titles except for three or four books which had been published almost against the will of the management, owing to constant pressure from a few editors who had been nursing the new literature sprouting from the post-1934 desert. An editor of this kind came to our island, read my "book of narratives," and started pushing it through the monstrous state-publishing machinery, suddenly less resistant than it had ever been since 1934. "Suppose the Czechs come again and we have nothing to show them except the same three or four books?" Thus my editor explained the new trend.

The Czechs never came. My book was shelved till a new Spring, to come perhaps beyond my lifespan.

Predictably, the invasion of Czechoslovakia swept our birch-tree island as well. A neighbor of ours who lived across the street—Alexei Surkov by name—had been one of the most ignorant and vicious cliché-spreaders of the pre-1953 period. General Secretary of the Union of Writers, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist party, and everything else one could be a member of before 1953, he began sliding downward after Stalin's death, along with the other overly conspicuous eulogists, though he always tried to adjust to the way the wind was blowing. (In 1965, he wanted me to know that he had always admired, expounded, and defended Pasternak, though in fact he had persecuted him practically all his life.)

In the late 60's the wind changed once more, and aware of his returning power, which transformed a shriveled has-been into his former haughty, exuberantly healthy self, Surkov vented his hatred of me, a nobody (not even a trade-union member!) who dared to live (and in a more sumptuous home!) right next door to him, a member of the Supreme Soviet. First he denounced me as a spy for Israel, evidently expecting a return of the good old days when his wife had worked as Vishinsky's secretary and the liquidation of whoever bothered her husband had been nothing more than a household chore. But nothing happened. Since the state-security office considers denunciations in complete secrecy, the Surkovs never knew which official was considering theirs and hence could not exert any influence. Complete secrecy worked against them. The situation would have been different, the Surkovs realized, if their denunciation had accused me of a *nonpolitical* trespass: it would then have gone to the prosecution office where they knew the official handling the case and could have pulled some strings.

On May 28, 1969, my neighbor made a new move. He sent up a denunciation stating that I had stolen money from him and other neighbors; the list of names constituted something like a "Who's Who Before 1953 and After." Afraid to displease a member of the Supreme Soviet, and not averse to earning a few rubles in return for my ten-year imprisonment and the confiscation of all my property, the other members of the Who's Who (with exceptions) took up the cry.

I eventually proved, however, that to make his denunciation plausible this member of the Supreme Soviet had had a receipt forged, an official seal broken, and official documents destroyed. Apart from all that, he was a criminal anyway since a deliberately false denunciation is penal *per se* under Article 180 of the Criminal Code. Now we were in each other's mortal grip: he had to prove I was a criminal in order to prove he was not, and I had to prove he was a criminal in order to prove I was not.

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In my favor were his meanness, so slow and crude that my wife and I could always anticipate his next move—much to his disadvantage; his total lack of talent for anything other than ingratiation and/or recrimination; my wife's devotion, combining the innocent charm of a dove, the wisdom of a serpent, and the alertness of a tigress when her next of kin are endangered; my own understanding of the social and legal mechanisms at work; and last but not least, my money, which enabled us in particular to photocopy all the documents, have the photocopies bound nicely into green notebooks, and send these to whoever might counteract some of my neighbor's wirepulling.

"But are there many people in the country who have possibilities like yours, Lev Andreyevich?" a local inhabitant bitterly commented to me.

A true Kafkaesque epic, it was bound to be interminable and inconclusive: he was unable to frame me, but neither could I sue a member of the Supreme Soviet, or give the matter publicity, or call him to account for his crime against a person like myself—just a human being, a nobody.

In the midst of all this, quite suddenly and contrary to all sober predictions, several people we knew were allowed to go to Israel though they had no parent, child, spouse, or sibling living there. Everything, including our country house, became meaningless. Early in April we sold our birch-tree island to the very first bidder (appropriately enough, the ex-President of the Academy of Sciences) and became "Jews applying for exit visas to join their relatives in Israel."

Q. *What is the spiritual background of these Jews?*

A. Before the Six-Day War, Jewishness in Russia was still largely where my mother had left it in 1903 when she went to the *gymnasium* to study that amazing culture called Russian.

The delight of being a Russian. My mother and her sisters went to hear every great Russian poet and novelist—to see their gods in the flesh, to hear them speaking in the heavenly tongue called Russian. How beautiful Russia is when seen through their revelations—how beautiful her remote monasteries, her nuns in black, the stars over her meadows, her Gypsies, her Shrovetides. It is from Russian literature that Russian greatness was prophesied, and when in the autumn of 1917 Russia swerved from the European road of development, it was still asserted with suicidal exaltation that a nation having such a unique literature was bound to do something unique, amazing, insane—*Russian*—in politics as well.

In my childhood the very name *Russia* was a forbidden or forgotten word, a mystery with a foretaste of martyrdom. Today every hack in the hierarchy exclaims: "Russia!" (exactly as in the 30's he exclaimed: "Proletariat!") until a sensitive person shudders at the very sound of the word. Yet this debasement of Russian national values has served additionally to revive other national values—particularly Jewish ones, that now have the tremendous advantage of novelty. And persecution could only add an extra appeal, the appeal of a mystery revealed only to the initiated.

THE tables are turned: at the beginning of the century Jews born of two Jewish parents wanted to be Russian. Now a Russian friend of mine without a streak of Jewish blood in him and having only in-laws in Israel went there in truly nationalist fervor. My wife gave to him as a gift her family relic, a menorah which had been kept in the family for many generations and hidden during the Nazi occupation. This man in fact was one of the pioneers of the exodus in Russia and initiated us as well as many others. As I indicated, the transvaluation of national values was precipitated by the Six-Day War.

Q. *In what way?*

A. My mother had gone to the Russian *gymnasium* in 1903 with a vision of educated Russians (according to Russian literature) as fine, noble, intelligent Europeans with a streak of genius about them, and of Jews (according to Jewish literature) as tragicomic freaks, eager to be protected, refined, and Europeanized by educated Russians. Characteristically, Russian-Jewish literature grew from the "Jewish joke," and with a generous splash of the tragic, it became tragicomic. Somewhere in the unconscious of many Russian Jews the tragicomic imagery lingered until the Six-Day War finally blasted it out.

Please imagine the scope and power of this spiritual blast.

Able to draw freely on a reservoir of a hundred million men, the Soviet inheritors of Russia's 18th-century military glory had been preparing their Egyptian clients for an invasion of a remote, tiny patch of semi-desert sparsely inhabited by freaks, pictured by 19th-century Russian humorists as soldiers because nothing was believed to be funnier than a Jew forced to fire a rifle. Within six days it became clear that the Jewish state was a modern democracy populated by fine, noble, intelligent Europeans, while the Russian military turned out to be the tragicomic freaks.

Q. *If the tendency is to keep everyone in Russia, why have several families of Moscow, including yours, been let out?*

A. Before 1953 millions of people could disappear without the outside world's knowledge. In the post-1953 era, any persecution can become the subject of publicity—at least in Moscow with its foreigners (students, tourists, correspondents, etc.) as well as hosts of other people in touch

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with the outside world, and cities linked with Moscow by good transportation facilities.

Suppose an applicant's salary is reduced from 160 rubles to 120 rubles a month in reprisal for his desire to go to Israel. His friend A drops in and learns the news from his wife or son. Then A meets B, B meets C, etc., until W meets X, a foreign graduate student he knows from the university, X meets Y, a foreign correspondent, who will never report anything "so anti-Soviet," but who passes it on to Z, who will.

Now if Jews in other countries are interested (and they are), the news will be reported all over the world. The state-security office cannot prove that the news was passed on when, say, E met F at G's, especially since both E and F are perfectly aware of electronic surveillance and will never say aloud anything that can be used as evidence.

The transmission of outward-bound news by mail has been stopped by a simple device: all suspicious letters or letters addressed to or from suspicious persons or countries are not allowed through. On the other hand, telephone conversations are a much tougher problem. How can a state-security man break off a conversation on suspicion if the voices can only be identified much later? Nor can he be expected to know all the 3,000 languages in the world or to determine on the spot whether the conversation is in one of these languages or in a code.

Of course, state-security officials may get a top-level decision authorizing certain reprisals against say, ten, a hundred, or ten thousand Jews picked out at the officials' discretion. That is what actually was done when those Leningrad Jews were provoked to flee by plane. The result was still more resounding publicity all over the world, which is something those in power avoid, for they do not want to antagonize the West more than is necessary, with China as a growing threat. On the other hand, the intimidation effect was nil.

Q. *Why?*

A. Isolated reprisals cannot intimidate desperate or resolute people because the population is inured to life-destruction. Nor can the state-security office stop the transmission of outward-bound information by reprisals against the "leaders of the Zionist organization" because there are neither leaders nor an organization.

It is simply that our family, for example, was very friendly with several other families: our common goal and common danger made us deeply devoted to one another (which could not be used as proof against us either). Now, each of these families was in turn friendly with several other families, and thus those who wished to leave and all their sympathizers were linked in a social entity, cohesive and dynamic, yet inchoate, spontaneous, and self-regenerating.

Before last spring I had been an outsider. Then my friend's friend got an exit visa! He introduced our family to a friend of his, who in turn introduced us to another applicant, and very soon everyone in Russia who was not an applicant seemed to my wife and me insipid, parochial, insignificant, and any activity except the exodus absurd or insane. On the other hand, a novel sense of Jewish brotherhood—of affection, I should say, regardless of sex or age, background or character—quickly developed among ourselves and other applicants.

Q. *What kind of Moscow people became applicants—age, education, etc?*

A. It is nice to observe the crowd that gathers at the airport to see off those fortunate enough to be leaving. Hardly a single undistinguished face. Mostly people in their thirties and forties—they seem to be the driving force at any rate. People who have exhausted the possibilities of Soviet life. Some of them drifted into the exodus from what is known as the democratic movement, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia had crushed all hopes.

When a husband dares to join the exodus struggle and his wife does not or vice versa, families tend to split rather than to stay in Russia together.

Q. *You have mentioned the democratic movement. What is it, specifically, and how is it connected with the exodus?*

A. Let me mention three of its now well-known elements: 1) Valery Chalidze's and Andrei Sakharov's Committee on Human Rights; 2) open self-expression (protests, complaints, appeals, etc.); and 3) *samizdat*—that mode of underground publication whereby a reader gets a typed copy of a work, has it retyped, and, keeping one copy for himself, passes the others on.

Mr. Chalidze's Committee is a highly useful yet extremely delicate undertaking. In a country where to make shoes independently of the hierarchy is a crime, he has managed to set up an organization independent of the hierarchy! Primarily, Mr. Chalidze tries to assure those in power that his organization will not be harmful to them, while its suppression will not pass unnoticed in the outside world.

Q. *Did you take part in the organization?*

A. No, of course not. Mr. Chalidze would have never accepted me anyway. The idea is to have as few members as possible in order to minimize the apprehension of those in power and to attract high-status members or high-publicity-value members like Sakharov or Solzhenitsyn so that their suppression would attract maximum notice. Why should he need me, a person of no status? Status in Russia is incomparably more important than it is in a democratic country, and even those in Russia who regard the USSR Academy of Sciences as one of the hierarchy's

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most despicable, subservient, and pernicious agencies never forget to say *Academician* Sakharov in referring to that person. Though expelled from the Union of Writers of the USSR, Solzhenitsyn, thanks to the outside world, has such a high unofficial status that reprisals against him are still more undesirable from the point of view of those in power than reprisals against, say, one thousand no-status people scattered somewhere in obscurity far from the country's "center."

Even if Mr. Chalidze's Committee has no other use, the very existence of an organization independent of the hierarchy is an achievement.

Q. *Did you take part in any other open forms of democratic dissidence?*

A. No person of my spiritual vintage could have. Orwell's hero in *1984* tries to preserve his ego but perishes since the state is omnipotent and the individual is doomed. The goal of my life was to prove Orwell wrong, to prove that the individual can develop a defense mechanism matching the omnipotence of the state.

I developed this defense mechanism. Why should I then disarm, let the state-security office get at my real self and thus perhaps triumph over me, since my actions would be sufficient proof of a political trespass? Anyway, all my writings would have been confiscated in the very first house search, a common occurrence in the life of a democratic dissident.

Yet without participating in their activity, I was friendly with many of the open dissidents and I have always been impressed by their personal altruism, kindness, and integrity; by the tragic destiny of their wives and children, their devotion, pride, and fortitude. All this, combined with the amazing, indeed, democratic humanism of many of them, actually prepared the soil for the exodus and even pioneered it at least in the large cities.

Q. *In what way?*

A. The dissidents showed, often at the price of their martyrdom, what I outlined at the very beginning—the socio-civic difference between pre- and post-1953 Russia. They demonstrated that those in power had either to give a free hand to state-security officials (and to the system of arbitrary reprisals that would inevitably ensue) or to insist on verifiable proof of trespass, thereby insuring a certain amount of latitude of behavior—more, certainly, than existed before 1953.

They charted, sometimes with their blood, the hitherto unknown topography of trespass, and having revealed this topography for everyone to see, they included in their general democratic program of "what you can do" the act of applying for a visa to join a relative in Israel. At first the visas were not granted. Then one of the dissidents, a physicist, now safely out, explained to an applicant (his friend's mother-in-law) how she should apply to the court. Surely it is no trespass to apply to the court? To sustain his democratic experiment by experimenting on himself, the physicist himself also applied for a visa to Israel. Soon *both* visas were granted. The precedent was set.

These people also set the example of friendship in need, so essential in areas of marginal activity. They demonstrated that since the interpretation of what constituted proof of trespass was often based on vague, ambiguous, contradictory instructions and since no official wanted to bear responsibility for the decision, rallying to the support of a friend often meant saving him.

Q. *It has occasionally been said in the West that those who declare that Jews are in danger exaggerate. What is your opinion?*

A. Jews as a group are educationally far above the average. At the turn of the century Jews were hereditary craftsmen, traders, etc., while the Slav population, with the exception of a tiny fraction, consisted of peasants (or peasants' children engaged in "proletarian" occupations like mining, etc.). In 1917 all restrictions on the migration of Jews were removed: the Jewish nation surged up like a huge nomadic wave and rolled toward the large cities of middle Russia. For education! This they got galore, for if a Jew and a Russian made an equal showing on an entrance exam the Jew would be admitted, because he was designated as belonging to a "national minority" (the fact that he was a child of a doctor, or a rabbi, or merchant, etc. was not inquired into), while the Russian was likely to belong to a group like "children of bourgeois professional people," "children of priests," "children of exploiters" (traders, property owners, rich peasants, etc.), not to mention "children of Czarist policemen," "children of Czarist officials," "children of White Guards," etc., and hence was barred as a potential vile traitor—on the basis of "scientific" prediction of group behavior.

Such group-behavior prediction is in fact inevitable in a society where all individual political self-expression is severely punished as a crime. In a democratic society the fitness of a candidate for a high-status or sensitive job can be gauged to some extent on the basis of his views and other individual traits more or less openly expressed. In Soviet society all people (except for those prepared for martyrdom) behave as though they were *infinitely devoted* to those in power. Hence those who are to determine the fitness of candidates for high-status state positions (and there are no other high-status positions) bar not only suspicious individuals but also whole groups suspected of being less infinitely devoted to those in power than other groups. One of the grounds for such group suspicion is a higher level of education.

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After 1917 the children of educated parents were discriminated against because they were the "bourgeois intelligentsia." In the mid-30s' Stalin declared that "our proletarian intelligentsia" had supplanted its "bourgeois" predecessor. Yet as soon as "our proletarian intelligentsia" had become educated enough, it too began to be discriminated against. In the 60's, children of "our proletarian intelligentsia" began to have difficulties even in being admitted to higher schools.

In the mid-30's the Jews surmised, and in the mid-40's they knew, that they were being ousted. The ouster began at the top of the hierarchy. Today there are still two or three Jews remaining at the near-ministerial level, evidently kept on to provide living examples for articles titled: "Jews in the USSR: Fiction and Reality."

More and more high-status higher schools are proud of the sterile purity of their student body, for, prudently enough, they stopped admitting Jews more than five years ago. When all the Jews who managed to get into high-status fields between 1917 and 1934, and in part up to 1949, have been ousted via dismissal, retirement, etc., these fields will be immaculately pure.

The process has been reciprocal, of course: the more the Jews have realized they are being ousted, the more anxious many of them have become to leave the country, etc., which, in turn, has been interpreted as lack of *infinite devotion* of the group as a whole.

Nor is the ouster initiated only from above. While in Russia there are no fair competitive conditions, there is fierce competition for status, which is often tantamount to survival. Competitors help to oust Jews not because they are "anti-Semitic" but because they will use any and all tactics available to them.

When all the Jews had been ousted from high-status activity in the large cities, the next question will be, how can they be trusted with residence in these cities? Residence in a large city connotes very high status in and of itself (young higher-school graduates prefer to live in Moscow as unemployed or unskilled workers rather than take a good job "far from the center" and thus lose the right to Moscow residence). On the other hand, in Russia's vast expanses even hundreds of millions may be easily enclosed, and provided they have no communication with the outside world, they may be allowed to live or die as they please.

It is true that the event—the Russian solution of the Jewish problem—may be as drab, quiet, and inconspicuous as all the other numerous similar events that have occurred since the autumn of 1917.

The alternative is the Jewish exodus from Russia.

Q. *To return to the beginning: did you leave Russia soon after getting your visas?*

A. We got our visas duly endorsed about 4:00 P.M. on October 22. When was the next flight? We rushed to the ticket office. The next flight was at ten in the morning.

Late at night our friends packed some of our clothes for us, because we did not want to take anything or do anything—we wanted only to live until ten o'clock in the morning.

It seemed to us insane to stay one minute longer than we had to. What if our visas were revoked during that minute? We would never forgive ourselves.

If one never has the opportunity to leave the territory once called Russia, one may be a hero or martyr and his life a tragedy or a saga of martyrdom. But if one has the chance to leave, yet lets that chance slip, he is a slave or clown and even if he chooses by his own will to be a victim rather than an executioner, his death will be despicable or farcical.

As a matter of fact, I told everyone who sought my advice to memorize this precept: "Leave the territory once called Russia. For if the movement of people in and out is not as free as it was in Russia for noblemen in the 19th century and for all residents until the 1920's, the territory is not Russia, nor are its values values, and it is a sin and a crime to remain if you have a chance to leave. And if the movement of people in and out is free, your leaving does not matter because you may take the next jet back."

Q. *Was there any reaction to your departure?*

A. Making a speech about the expulsion of the poet Galich from the Union of Writers, Mr. Gribachov, one of the writers in charge of the Writers' Union, also mentioned me. Here was Navrozov, he said, a respected, prosperous translator, yet suddenly he wants to leave our country. The result of this foolish desire? According to Mr. Gribachov, I am now on my knees before the Soviet Embassy in Rome, begging to be allowed to return.

Another reaction was that the court finally decided the Navrozov-versus-Surkov case in my favor. Well, after this has been published, the court will perhaps be forced to rewrite its decision in order to provide material for a character smear. Meanwhile, Mr. Surkov himself has convened a general meeting of residents of the "Moscow Writers' " settlement and announced that my wife, myself, and my son have died. The circumstances of our highly edifying demise were described in great detail and with much color.

I received the news rather as one might while lying on those heaps of clouds to be found in old engravings, looking down through a chink in the clouds at the tiny, grotesque, rather pitiful figures below.

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The Quota Commission

Elliott Abrams

A GREAT deal of attention has been directed lately to the efforts of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and especially its Office for Civil Rights, to force universities and other institutions which depend on federal contracts to follow quota systems in their hiring practices.* Very little attention, however, has so far been paid to another federal agency, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which has—despite all its protestations to the contrary—been furthering the same tendency. Yet the EEOC, established under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to enforce the provision in Title VII prohibiting discrimination in employment against any individual because of his "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," has just this year been given additional powers, and may soon rival HEW for leadership in the movement to replace a commitment to equal opportunity with federally-enforced quota systems.

Before passage of the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972 the EEOC had only the power to study and make recommendations; now it can bring suit in federal court against any employer it deems to be guilty of discrimination. Previously its area of responsibility was limited to corporations and labor unions; now, under the new legislation, its area of jurisdiction has been expanded to include the 4 million employees of state and local governments. To the Commission and its supporters, these new powers and responsibilities represent a major gain in the fight against employment discrimination. But a close examination of the Commission's seven years of activity reveals that its increased powers represent, instead, a step forward for those who believe that quotas are the only or the most desirable way of bringing an end to discrimination in America.

I

THE EEOC enters a case when an employee files a complaint of some sort against his employer. In any state with a creditable Fair Employment Practices Commission, the EEOC must defer to this local body. Most of the cases so deferred return to the EEOC, the state commissions having failed to settle the disputes. The EEOC then investigates and eventually makes its finding that reasonable cause does or does not exist to believe that Title VII has been violated. If not, the charge is dismissed, leaving the charging party with the decision as to whether to go into court on his own. If reasonable cause is found, the EEOC will attempt to resolve the dispute by conciliation. If conciliation efforts fail, the 1972 Act now gives the EEOC the right to bring suit in the federal district courts. That it intends to exercise this right to the full is clear from the fact that it began filing such suits very soon after the Act was passed.

The EEOC gets three different sorts of cases: cases in which the employer is discriminating intentionally; cases in which the employer's past discriminatory practices are carried forward by ostensibly neutral practices in the present; and cases in which an ostensibly neutral employment practice results in a work force containing a smaller percentage of minorities than does the general population.

The easy cases are those in which intentional discrimination is the issue. Here everyone understands that what has allegedly been done is illegal, though proving that it has actually been done may be difficult. Some of the most important cases in this area have involved labor unions, and the courts in many cities have followed the EEOC in finding that, especially in the construction trades, many locals were simply refusing to admit blacks. In other cases, a single foreman or plant manager was found to be discriminating, even though his superiors were opposed to such action. But the EEOC early established the proposition that "The mere announcement of a policy against racial discrimination is not sufficient when management has reason to believe that racial discrimination is occurring. Management must take steps to insure that the policy is observed at all levels." The Commission has also been quick to dismiss the thin excuses for bias often offered. For example, when one foreman defended his refusal to hire blacks for skilled jobs with the observation that they have thick

ELLIOTT ABRAMS, here making his first appearance in COMMENTARY, holds degrees from Harvard and the London School of Economics and is currently in his third year at the Harvard Law School.

* See "HEW & the Universities" by Paul Seabury (February)—ED.

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hands and lack dexterity, his reasoning failed to impress the EEOC investigators.

With regard to the second group of cases, those in which the effects of past discrimination are being carried forward either in recruitment or in promotion, the EEOC has taken the view that practices fair in form but discriminatory in effect are barred by Title VII. Concerning recruitment, the Commission stated in a 1969 case: "We believe that where, as here, an employer has excluded minorities from employment in the past because of race, there cannot be the equal employment opportunity mandated by Title VII unless the employer makes reasonable efforts to advise the Negro community that his practices have changed and that minority applicants will be considered on an equal basis." Thus, an employer whose work force is all white due to past discrimination may not rely solely on referral of new applicants by present employees, and may not give preference to new applicants who are relatives of present employees.

So too with seniority. A labor-union hiring hall, for example, will generally not be permitted to assign members to jobs in order of seniority when its own past discriminatory practices have prevented blacks from acquiring that seniority. As one federal district court stated in a Title VII case: ". . . Congress did not intend to freeze an entire generation of Negro employees into discriminatory patterns that existed before the Act."

Some controversy has been provoked by this second group of cases, but not nearly so much as the third group, in which a formally fair employment practice is called discriminatory by the EEOC *only* because it results in a work force containing a smaller percentage of minorities or women than does the surrounding population. It is these cases which have led to charges that the EEOC is instituting a quota system, insisting not on equal opportunity but on proportional representation, and is thereby itself violating the law. For Section 703 (j) of Title VII states that:

> Nothing contained in this title shall be interpreted to require any employer . . . to grant preferential treatment to any individual or to any group because of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such individual or group on account of an imbalance which may exist with respect to the total number or percentage of persons of any race, color, religion, sex, or national origin employed by an employer . . . in comparison with the total number or percentage of persons of such race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in any community, State, section, or other area, or in the available work force in any community, State, section, or other area.

II

IN ANY discrimination case, there are two possible sorts of evidence, direct and statistical. In cases of intentional discrimination, one may hope to find both sorts of evidence. In voting-rights cases, for example, the United States would often present both individual accounts of intimidation and figures showing that in an area whose population was one-third or one-half black, not a single black was registered to vote. The federal courts came to accept such evidence, feeling, as the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals said in 1970, that "In racial discrimination cases, statistics often demonstrate more than the testimony of witnesses, and they should be given proper effect by the courts."

In cases involving past discrimination, similarly, both direct and statistical evidence is provided. Here the trick is to prove through direct evidence that intentional discrimination did in fact occur in the past and to use the statistics showing underrepresentation to prove that the employer's past violations have yet to be remedied in the present.

Obviously, when no intentional discrimination has ever occurred, the situation is greatly altered. Here a single fact becomes the basis of the case: there is a greater proportion of minority groups or women in the local population than is included in the employer's work force. Yet from this fact alone no violation of law can be proved. First of all, it may be that the underrepresented groups do not want the job. Thus Judge Charles Wyzanski of the U.S. District Court in Boston found in *Castro* v. *Beecher* that blacks were not represented on the police force of that city in proportion to their numbers in the local population not because they were being kept out by discrimination but "because of hostility to the calling and because, if qualified to be policemen, blacks have more rewarding and otherwise attractive offers for other positions." Usually, however, an employer on whose work force the minorities in question are underrepresented will claim that they are not qualified for the job, and it is this claim the EEOC will most often dispute. The battle is customarily, then, over what constitutes a reasonable job qualification.

As a result of the Supreme Court's 1971 decision in *Griggs* v. *Duke Power* the legal limits of this battlefield are no longer vague. This case concerned a company which required that standardized general-intelligence tests be taken as a condition of employment or promotion. Black employees, who scored lower than whites on the tests, argued that the tests discriminated by race (in that their low scores resulted from the poor educations they had been given due to their race), and were not a reasonable job requirement (in that low scores on such tests had never been shown to be predictive of poor performance in any particular job). The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the employees, holding that:

> What is required by Congress is the removal of artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary barriers to

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> employment when the barriers operate invidiously to discriminate on the basis of racial or other impermissible classification. . . . If an employment practice which operates to exclude Negroes cannot be shown to be related to job performance, the practice is prohibited.

The *Griggs* decision represents an endorsement of a whole series of EEOC findings and federal court decisions. The net effect of these is to put an employer on the defensive when his work force is not representative of the local community, and to make him demonstrate that his job qualifications are related to job performance when they can be shown to have a discriminatory result either against minorities or against women.

III

THE salutary effects of the EEOC's work, and of the work of other federal agencies in the same field, have been considerable. Few would care to argue that without federal pressure the progress thus far made toward equal opportunity in employment would have been possible. It is desirable, then, that the EEOC put employers on the defensive when their work forces show an underrepresentation of women or minorities. Given the persistence of widespread discrimination in our society, and the frequent misuse of the principle of qualifications, employers may justly be burdened with the need to explain; and given the depth of our commitment as a society to root out discrimination, it is also desirable that those charged with enforcing this commitment should be zealous in their work.

However, when statistical underrepresentation of minorities rather than intentional discrimination is at issue, an excess of zeal can and often does lead to policies which are themselves against the law. This, indeed, is what seems to have happened with the EEOC, whose policies are for all practical purposes making it impossible for an employer to insist on any but the most simplistically-conceived job qualifications.

For example, the Commission's "Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures," which concern the use of written tests, are so complex that—instead of insuring that tests will be used fairly rather than as an arbitrary means of excluding certain groups—they virtually insure that testing will be done away with altogether. Analyzing these Guidelines, the Harvard *Law Review* concluded in a 1971 article that they "appear designed to scare employers away from any objective standards which have a differential impact on minority groups, because, applied strictly, the testing requirements are impossible for many employers to follow."

On the issue of job-relatedness and the relevance of the applicant's background, the EEOC's position has a similar effect. Thus EEOC decisions, showing a skepticism about the value of education worthy of Ivan Illich or the late Paul Goodman, have barred any educational requirements (such as a high-school diploma) unless they can be shown to be related in the most literal sense to the job in question. In line with this policy, the only EEOC decision in the past several years approving any educational standard was one confirming that a grocery cashier may be required to know arithmetic. It is worth noting that while the Supreme Court in *Griggs* asked only that employment requirements be "related to job performance," the Commission will not allow an educational requirement without proof of its "overriding business necessity."

On another matter in the area of a job applicant's background, the matter of criminal convictions, the Commission has also taken a position whose effect is to prohibit an employer from insisting on what would seem to be a reasonable standard of qualification. In *Gregory* v. *Litton Systems,* a federal district court in California held that an applicant with a record of fourteen arrests and no convictions could not be denied a job on that basis alone. Since "[t]here is no evidence to support a claim that persons who have suffered no criminal convictions but have been arrested on a number of occasions can be expected, when employed, to perform less efficiently or less honestly than other employees," the exclusion of arrestees is not "related to job performance." The court here was clearly reasonable in forbidding consideration of arrest records. Arrests without convictions prove nothing about an individual's conduct and the fact that blacks show many more arrests without convictions than do whites reflects less on blacks than it does on the police. Not content with this, however, the EEOC seems ready to decree that not even a criminal *conviction* may disqualify a person from employment. In its view Title VII "makes it unlawful to discharge or refuse to employ a minority-group person because of a conviction record unless the particular circumstance of each case [e.g. the time, nature, and number of convictions and the employee's immediate past-employment record] indicates that employment of that particular person for a particular job is manifestly inconsistent with the safe and efficient operation of that job." Commission staff members have admitted that a record of convictions for larceny might well be a bar to employment in a bank, but anything less (or more, like murder or rape) might well not be "job-related" in the simplistic sense in which the Commission uses the term.

In short, the EEOC not only holds that a statistical underrepresentation of minorities in any work force or job category in itself constitutes evidence of discrimination; it also holds that discrimination is being practiced whenever an em-

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ployer insists on any intellectual or moral qualification which cannot in the most literal terms be related to a given job.

Judge Wyzanski, in the Boston case mentioned above, found that the written exam for joining the Boston police force was not related to job performance and was therefore unlawful. But he did approve several of the other job qualifications which had been challenged, among them the high-school diploma requirement, and he had this to say on the issue of proportional representation:

> It is a fallacy to suppose that the Constitution entitles blacks to police selected like jurors as representatives of a cross-section of the community. . . . What blacks and other minorities have a right to is that public employees like policemen shall be selected by criteria that are significantly related to the job. If employees are so selected in good faith, it is from a constitutional angle wholly irrelevant that the result is that blacks get a percentage less than their percentage of the population.

Nevertheless, EEOC policies have in effect continued to push for preferential hiring to achieve proportional representation of specified minority groups in every job category. These policies are often defended as an extension of the Philadelphia Plan which calls for "affirmative action" with specific "goals" and which has been upheld in the courts. However, though active recruitment, widespread advertising, and the establishment of training programs in minority communities are indeed required by law, proportional representation and preferential treatment in hiring are not only *not* required but are, quite simply and unambiguously, unlawful. The Supreme Court settled this in the *Griggs* decision, where Chief Justice Burger, writing for the majority, declared that Title VII "does not command that any person be hired simply because he is a member of a minority group. Discriminatory preference for any group, minority or majority, is precisely and only what Congress has proscribed." And the Court went on to affirm that the merit system, and not the quota system, is the law of the land: "Congress has not commanded that the less qualified be preferred over the better qualified simply because of minority origins. Far from disparaging job qualifications, Congress has made such qualifications the controlling factor, so that race, religion, nationality, and sex become irrelevant."

In 1970, a member of the EEOC staff told the Harvard *Law Review* that "The anti-preferential hiring provisions [of Title VII] are a big zero, a nothing, a nullity. They don't mean anything at all to us." Today, no responsible Commission spokesman would ever make such a statement for the record. But what is said for the record is, of course, beside the point. What the EEOC wants to do or what it thinks it is doing is considerably less important than the practical effects of its actions. In attacking outright and intentional discrimination, and in challenging job requirements truly unrelated to actual job performance, the Commission has done its work well and followed its mandate under the law. But in making it all but impossible for an employer to escape charges of discrimination if he attempts to hire on the basis of individual merit, and unless he follows a system of preferential treatment and proportional representation of nonwhites and women, the EEOC is clearly violating the law as enunciated by Congress and as confirmed by the Supreme Court.

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Why Some Children Don't Speak

Sonya Rudikoff

THE pain of parents knows no end—the parents waiting for letters and telephone calls, the parents searching for itinerant children, the parents so relentlessly attacked and disowned and abandoned, the parents whose children disappear into the vast limbo of the world outside to become "the children who are lost to us," the parents who feel that their love and work and devotion meet no reward except disaffection and the serpent's tooth. A man of seventy who is beyond it may say, "Parents must be strong enough to take whatever comes," and perhaps they should, but frequently they are not, because their pain is part of their love. And they are always inescapably, unalterably, the children's parents.

In our contemporary life and literature, we have become familiar with examples of the unreachable, remote, inaccessible adolescent and all his problematic situations. On all sides there is advice, analysis, therapy, or social invention proffered to alleviate the pain. But what of the unreachable, remote, inaccessible infant, the child who does not respond, who will not talk, who is not *there*? No remarks on understanding, or the generations, or idealism, or the affluent society will erase that pain, that special instance of the pain of parenthood as it is felt by the parents of an autistic child, or a handicapped child. Brain damage, childhood schizophrenia, and other afflictions are neither related in any obvious way to social ideas, or modern child-rearing practices, or contemporary moral failures, nor is there at hand any social remedy which can be offered by the casual observer. Especially the mental illnesses of childhood are resistant to cultural prescription and cure.

AUTISM—from the Greek, *autós,* meaning self—is one of the mental illnesses of childhood, a form of schizophrenia, which suddenly, inexplicably, afflicts a child and transforms the family around him. An autistic child is not retarded, not mentally defective, not spastic or brain-damaged or physically deformed, although sometimes he is thought to be; nor is he psychopathic, or neurotic, or necessarily "disturbed" at all, unless others disturb *him*. Nor are such children deaf, mute, or blind, although sometimes they are believed to be so because they don't seem to hear, see, or respond. They may be unable to perform the simplest tasks, their motor skills and speech never having developed, or having been abandoned, but they have no physical handicaps. An autistic child is usually endowed with good health and beauty, often with superb agility, manual dexterity, acute perception, impressive endurance, and, oddly enough, no apparent fears at all. If autism develops before the child has learned to talk, the chances are against his acquiring speech later. Sometimes autism appears after the child has began to speak like an ordinary two- or three-year-old, and one of the invariable symptoms of autism is the change or fading or disappearance of speech in a child who at an earlier time could speak quite normally. Autism in a child who already talks may appear in such signs as pronominal inversion, the regular use of "you" for "I," the seeming inability to say "I" at all under any circumstances, or "yes." Other signs are the long lists of things committed to memory, for no apparent use except repetition, the swift learning of difficult, odd, or abstract words far beyond the child's capacity, coupled with a failure at simple communicative speech: "scissors" or "heptagon" are learned easily, but not "I want" or "May I?" or "Mother." The autistic child seems not to wish to communicate, nor to be aware of others. Obviously, such a child will have great difficulties in learning everything, not merely speech, because there is no learning by imitation at all, and no reciprocal learning. As one mother put it, the child seems to be living in a glass ball, visible but unreachable, a changeling.

What apparently happens is that after a generally normal birth, and an infancy undistinguished by gross complications, the child gives certain disquieting signs, such as being unable to turn over or stand or walk or move his head or arms or legs at the usual times. If already speaking, the child may stop, will increasingly not answer when called, will gradually begin to seem to be "in another world," "behind an invisible screen." If not already toilet-trained, the child

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will be completely indifferent to learning. There may or may not be an illness or distinct traumatic family event when the outside world impinges, or something calls attention to the child's strangeness. Perhaps it is a routine visit to the doctor for routine shots; the doctor observes that the child is not walking or not turning over or not speaking, although such skills would be expected at the child's age. The parents may be unconcerned, and need the prodding of the doctor to regard it seriously; or, alternately, the parents may be extremely concerned, and the doctor attempts to reassure them or dismiss their worry as overprotectiveness. Nowadays, the familiar developmental landmarks of childhood, such as turning over, raising the head, holding objects, passing objects from hand to hand, creeping, crawling, standing, speaking, and so on are not very seriously heeded. Parents are permissive and have been cautioned not to transfer their ambitions to their children, not to urge or push or spur their infants to early proficiency, but to wait for the child's own readiness. And their casual attitude toward the attainment of skills has been sustained by the whole culture, in its instinct for equality and tolerance, in the generous impulse to include and welcome all.

Furthermore, many children never creep, or stand before they crawl, or never pass through certain stages, or are very late in acquiring skills but seem none the worse for it; modern parents adduce Einstein, who didn't speak until he was four, or Macaulay, who waited until he was five and then spoke in long, complex sentences. Indeed, to press the demands of growth has been thought to be unnecessary as well as harmful, an intrusion of the instrumental into the pleasure-oriented world of childhood. Thus, the concerned parents, and the doctor who shares or minimizes their concern, do not at first take any action, usually preferring to wait six months or a year, to see whether the child's growth won't right itself. This time is spent in increasingly anxious observation of the child, in renewed attempts to evoke speech or response, and, inevitably, in intensified concern, despair, and anger over the child's demands which were perhaps acceptable in an infant of six months but now, relatively unchanged, become unbearable in a two- or three-year-old child. The passage of time only reveals the child's disabilities more sharply, and the now extremely concerned parents seek further advice.

No one dies of autism. Psychopathic personalities and drug addicts commit crimes, not autistic children whose families usually have no history of mental illness, and who have normal siblings and a reasonably normal home environment. Autistic children have usually had good physical care; they have been born into both large and small families; they have grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles who care. Our world is full of terribly neurotic, unhappy, rambunctious children, impossibly difficult children, deprived, abandoned, ignored, rejected, brutalized children; their lives may be deplorable, but the children are not necessarily autistic. Nor are the waifs, the children of chaotic families, the babies born of addicted mothers, the victims of war and catastrophe. That photograph in the newspapers recently of the children fleeing napalm attacks, the girl shrieking, and naked because she had pulled off her burning clothes, those terrible examples of pain and cruelty, the physical injuries and the unknown emotional and mental damage—this most vivid pain contrasts sharply with the withdrawn state of the autistic children, who seem not to be at all affected by any experience whatsoever. Wrapped up in themselves, as the designation of their illness suggests, out of responsive reach of anyone, they seem to do nothing, see nothing, speak nothing.

ALTHOUGH there is reason to believe that autism can be found throughout the child population, public awareness of it has been slow, perhaps because professional understanding of it remains still clouded. As a specific syndrome, it was first discerned in 1943 by an eminent child psychiatrist, Leo Kanner, of Johns Hopkins. In the intervening years, other gifted and perceptive psychiatrists have worked with autistic children with varying results, but the condition continues to be a puzzling one, and it does not clearly respond to any specific treatment. Much remains to be learned. The *Journal of Autistic and Childhood Schizophrenia*, edited by Kanner, is in its second year of publication. There is a National Society for Autistic Children, and research is being done in various places. There is of course disagreement on the causes of autism—whether genetic or environmental—and even if there were not, the question of treatment would be problematic. Like many other medical and psychological conditions, autism is not only a subject of interest for the profession; in recent years, there have been a number of books on it for the general reader, such as Bruno Bettelheim's *The Empty Fortress*,* which provides not only theoretical material but also case histories of three autistic children treated at the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School at the University of Chicago. And, as the diagnosis of autism becomes more familiar and frequent, there are the books written by parents of autistic children, such as Clara Claiborne Park's *The Siege*,† which tells of a remarkable mother working with her own child, and, more recently, Joan Martin Hundley's *The Small Outsider*,** and Josh Greenfeld's *A Child Called Noah*.††

* The Free Press, 1967.
† Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967.
** St. Martin's Press, 150 pp., $4.95.
†† Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 193 pp., $5.95.

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Mrs. Park's book, very intelligent, and lucidly written, would be especially useful for an intelligent parent of an autistic child. An educated and capable woman, living in an academic environment, she presents very vivid and explicit descriptions of the child's difficulties, and, most important, she offers her own imaginative improvisations with running reports on their efficacy. Of unusual interest is her close observation of the autistic child's relation to language and nonverbal messages. Mrs. Hundley's book, more modest in tone and scope, is a kind of battlefield report for those who know nothing of the terrain at all. Written by an Australian, its details are occasionally inapplicable, but one imagines that many Australian parents found comfort in this news of autism's existence and frequent occurrence, and in Mrs. Hundley's articles in Australian newspapers. Josh Greenfeld, however, is a writer, not only a concerned, intelligent parent, and his book commands attention for itself as well as for its contents.

A Child Called Noah is subtitled "A Family Journey"; it is in the form of a journal covering Noah's early years and mysterious development against the background of the family's life. This dramatic presentation goes beyond reportage to offer the texture of felt and lived life in an arresting way. How poignant and evocative is the repeated notation of those nights when Noah never sleeps—nocturnal pacing and roaming is characteristic of these children—or the father's realization that Noah does not reply when called, that there is some opaque film between him and the world, that he gives back so little and demands so much:

> At the age of four, Noah is neither toilet-trained, nor does he feed himself. He seldom speaks expressively, rarely employs his less-than-a-dozen-word vocabulary. His attention span in a new toy is a matter of split seconds, television engages him for only an odd moment occasionally, he is never interested in other children for very long. His main activities are lint-catching, thread-pulling, blanket-sucking, spontaneous giggling, inexplicable crying, eye-squinting, wall-hugging, circle-walking, bed-bouncing, jumping, rocking, door-closing, and incoherent babbling addressed to his finger-flexing right hand. But two years ago Noah spoke in complete sentences, had a vocabulary of well over 150 words, sang the verses of his favorite songs, identified the objects and animals in his picture books, was all but toilet-trained, and practically ate by himself.

How can a parent accept this? Greenfeld and his wife, Foumi, are alerted to Noah's puzzling condition during a routine visit to the doctor for shots at nine months, but for several years they anxiously await a "breakthrough," an end to the nightmare. Only gradually do the journal entries reveal a bitter accommodation to the illness:

> I realize that a dog in two nights at obedience school is still light years ahead of my boy. . . . I really can't quite accept myself yet as the father of a Noah. I just can't cast myself in that part—which is, of course, my role for life.

The parents of an autistic child must go on hoping, and must have a sense of the future, even if the child does not. Inaccurate and unlikely as it may be, their working belief is always that inside the remote and inaccessible changeling is a normal child waiting to be set free.

Although the story of Noah's descent into illness and his slow reversal is a most intimate one, and the journal form makes it especially so, the reader is nevertheless moved by an essential humility created in the situation itself. Of course, the Greenfelds are angry, despairing, hopeless; they fight, accusing one another of bad genes, harmful psychic inheritance, erratic behavior; they wonder whether their marriage can survive this burden, whether they themselves can. Foumi, a Japanese painter whom Greenfeld met at the MacDowell Colony, is incensed at America because its laws prevented her from having an abortion of the undesired pregnancy that produced Noah, and she is also angry at Greenfeld for wanting children at all. She threatens to leave repeatedly, she cannot go on, she rages and weeps. Greenfeld himself is equally distraught: his writer's life, her painter's life, their marriage, their future, their older child's life, all are shaken and nearly shattered. They get no sleep, they are never free from care, they cannot help but they cannot stop. Speaking of a divorced friend who missed the sound of children in the house, Greenfeld reports:

> . . . I was telling Foumi about it at dinner. "Let him have Noah for one night and see how much he misses the sound of children," she said. Karl [their older child], sitting at the table, put down his fork and looked up with wide, imploring eyes: "Please don't give Noah away," he said. Foumi and I tried to keep talking, but we couldn't. . . .

But there is still the laundry and cleaning to be done, anniversaries to be celebrated, birthdays, colds, summer and winter to be lived. And what about getting baby-sitters—hard enough even with normal children? And what of going to the beach, traveling, buying shoes?

LIFE with Noah is not entirely bleak and terrible. He can be sweet, appealing, gay—autistic children like to receive affection, although they don't give it, don't even kiss of their own accord as other children do—and the father is often assailed by passionate love for his family. A simple gesture from Noah, a word spoken, a step forward in development (as when Noah, age four-and-a-half, urinates stand-

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ing up for the first time), a real recognition ("Daddy!" suddenly) will give these parents great joy, and then their dormant wish to hope is renewed. When Greenfeld's book ends, Noah is five. He is not in the least a normal five-year-old, although he has made great progress. This child may never protest jokingly to his mother, "Jeez, Ref, I'm gonna pull my hair out," or firmly insist "I do it all by myself and nobody help me," may never know who Dave DeBusschere is or what Betsy Ross did, but his father is still able to find some joy in their troubled life, ending his journal with:

> And I've just gone to check on that first sentence of Tolstoy's, and come away shaking my head. "Happy families," I know, "are *not* all alike."

Perhaps he has earned the right to say this by recording those earlier, harsher thoughts, in previous entries:

> . . . Noah is indeed schizophrenic: to spend time with him is to spend time with insanity. And it's catching. Sometimes I even think Noah is my own insanity walking, my cursed other-self inflicted upon my own second son. . . .
>
> If one has a child like Noah, one needs money, one must have the time and the energy to work. But a child like Noah drains away one's energy, takes away one's time. There is simply no way out.
>
> I must confess something: sometimes I hope Noah gets sick and dies painlessly.

When the Greenfelds sought help for this strange illness that afflicted their child, they found very little. Like many other parents of autistic children, they discovered that the agencies of social betterment devote scant attention to autism. Everyone knows something about multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, leukemia, epilepsy, phenylketonuria (PKU), and how they ravage young children. There are frequent reports on them in the mass media, societies to inform the public about them, foundations, and research funds. Even mental illness in children has become known to the public at large—inevitably, when there are an estimated ten million children in the country who are mentally ill, and, it is believed, two million of them who are seriously disturbed. Less is known about autism than about other forms of schizophrenia, so it is not surprising that research funds, energies, and facilities would be diverted to the treatment of other severe childhood illnesses and disabilities. The National Society for Autistic Children, founded in 1962, holds annual meetings, publishes a newsletter, and offers the parents of autistic children a link with one another. It was just beginning when Mrs. Park wrote her book, and even the Greenfelds, literate and not unsophisticated, had difficulty getting information, and this in such proximity to New York City. In other parts of the country, unless the parents are close to a research center, their search for help will be even more troubled. As the Greenfelds discovered, in the absence of any specific help for the afflicted child, county mental-health agencies will offer therapy for the parents! The few schools and treatment centers that do exist are greatly in need of funds; parents sometimes themselves build a building and provide the instruction, or raise the money needed to keep the school going. Public schools may have special classes for handicapped children and a number of institutions have programs for this special education, but the need for funds is enormous and, because of confusion and ignorance, certain public institutions, like hospitals, receive more for the care and training of the physically handicapped than for others, as Greenfeld discovered when he was looking for schools and training programs. And, inevitably, this society, which can afford to pay for the Rolling Stones, and Clifford Irving, and *Fritz the Cat*, and cost overruns on missile systems, and oil-depletion allowances, cannot pay very much for the care of its ill children.

Even if there were enough money to treat all disabilities, there would be some uncertainty about the desirable treatment for autism. After the pediatrician alerts the parents, the ear, nose, and throat doctor performs his examination, the neurologist his, and then the speech therapist, the clinical psychologist, the psychiatrists. There are no disabilities, no constitutional signs, but the specialists all are unable to pierce the child's opacity. The psychiatrist is especially troubled because his métier depends on verbal report and this patient provides none, in fact, doesn't even *notice* the doctor. The mental-health teams may conclude that the child is either emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded, or both, but they can't go beyond that, and they don't know what should be done about it. Testing indicates a puzzling pattern: despite total lack of response to the tester, the child can often do parts of the tests—blocks and puzzles, for instance—with quite remarkable finesse and speed, quite unlike defectives or retardates. How to explain this capacity in children who do not imitate others, who refuse to be taught, seemingly cannot learn or remember, do not play, explore, or build upon previous learning?

Whether psychiatry with its special categories and methods is helpful for this condition is still uncertain. Analytic and psychiatric patients go to their treatment once a day, for less than an hour, three or four or five times a week for eleven months of the year. During the rest of the time, they live those lives which for one reason

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or another had been unsatisfactory and which are perhaps somewhat improved by the treatment. If these patients prove unable to continue with their lives for the other twenty-three hours of the day, they may enter mental hospitals, and have their psychiatric treatment supplemented by drugs or other kinds of therapy. In contrast to these patients—the walking wounded, as it were, who have a life already, even an imperfect, flawed, unrewarding life—the autistic children have not begun to have a life at all; there is nothing which can respond to such a schedule of therapeutic intervention, no life to return to. The autistic child needs to have his day created, his life begun, his time filled and stimulated, instead of remaining withdrawn in repetitive movement and self-stimulation. Autistic children do not point, or ask for anything, or reach; all the simple, early learning of relatedness to objects and people is disrupted. Everything that is an inevitable part of the toddler's development, everything which makes up the content of the average toddler's life, is missing. It is like bringing to the dentist a child whose teeth have not come in yet—there is nothing to work with.

There are special schools, some custodial institutions, and some residential treatment centers, such as the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School where Bruno Bettelheim has done his invaluable work with disturbed children. This famous and remarkable place, however, doesn't take children before the age of five or six, as the Greenfelds learned; then they were directed to a treatment center of the Jewish Board of Guardians which, predictably, replied that it couldn't take children who were non-verbal! Parents of disturbed adolescents can find places like the Institute for Living, or the Brattleboro Retreat, or the Riggs Center, or the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, with their wonderful programs, activities, schools, and advanced therapies, all excellent if the parents haven't themselves gone crazy contemplating the fees of $20,000 to $30,000 a year. Think of what that means: a sum of perhaps $500,000 or more which is not used for any purpose other than providing earmarked income for an unspecified number of years. Think of the families who can't possibly afford anything like that, who may not be indigent either: aren't their children just as autistic? Even less costly centers, or those entirely for younger children, or less elaborate, are both few in number and inadequate in program.

And the pain of parents knows no end. Concerned, desperate, brushing aside guilt, the parents of autistic children encounter a professional ideology which defines *them* as the ones in need of therapy, which says in effect that they are responsible for their child's illness, that they *are* in fact the illness. This is all buttressed by rather confident assertions about maternal deprivation, maternal rejection, estrangement, withdrawal, refrigerator parents, and so on. The prevalence of these authoritative hypotheses confirms Erik Erikson's idea that the "rejecting mother" may be the occupational prejudice of his profession. He notes that rescue fantasies abound. (And who has not seen this even with ordinary pediatricians and ordinary normal sick children, who are appealed to, as it were, over the heads of the parents?) Actually, if one considers the subtle, defensive psychic structures created by autistic children (the "empty fortress" in Bettelheim's designation), as if they were ancient armored creatures out of Marianne Moore, it is just as likely that they are resisting an overwhelmingly intrusive environment as that they reflect an unresponsively remote environment.

PARENTS of autistic children are especially vulnerable to these hypotheses because they want to know what's wrong, and they know their child has been so little affected by the world outside. Usually they feel guilt even before it is attributed, as the Greenfelds did at the first hint of Noah's troubled development, and everything afterward exacerbates their guilt. The parents who make those agonizing visits to hospitals and specialists come away with nothing very hopeful and, what is worse, with no sense of anything at all they can do. Between the guilt and pain they feel over the child's illness, and the horror of abandoning him to an institution, these parents are truly at sea. It is one of the excruciating facts about autism that the children are often unusually beautiful and appealing in their self-contained inwardness, like cats or deer or lemurs. Their autism doesn't reveal itself fully until the parents have had a few years to become extremely fond of them, and the longer they are at home, the more devoted the parents feel, and the more nightmarish their dilemma. Greenfeld observes:

> I also know I must try not to feel more sorry for myself than for Noah, but some days I forget. . . .

It should surprise no one that the parents of these children become interested in various unorthodox methods of treatment, such as "patterning" and megavitamin therapy, and operant conditioning. The medical profession frowns on them but innumerable parents are nevertheless encouraged to attempt them. Patterning exercises try to repair brain damage by forcing nerves and muscles to retrace certain steps in neural and cerebral development which presumably then make possible the later, more complex processes of speech, walking, cognition, and so on. A parent who embarks on this will have instructions about the exercises, the sequences, the schedule to be followed with his child. Megavitamin therapy involves the use of extremely

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large doses of various vitamins and chemical substances, in the belief that autism, like other forms of schizophrenia, is caused by chemical imbalance. It too has been extremely effective in modifying the behavior of disturbed children. Noah was much improved by it, as others have been. It may not teach a child to speak, or to tie his shoes, or to draw circles, but, by changing behavior, it promotes the possibility of learning them. It is also something quite definite which the parents can do to help the child.

A more specific therapy is behavior modification by operant conditioning, as developed by Ivor Lovaas at UCLA. Less a therapy than a learning method, it involves the use of reward and punishment to evoke response and action on the child's part. The method employs not merely smiles and frowns, or encouraging and discouraging tones or expressions, but very precisely Fritos, candy, potato chips, pretzels, peanuts, whatever the child especially likes, which are used to bribe him, in effect, into talking, doing puzzles, behaving properly, learning. Mild physical punishment is included, as well as verbal admonition, even the withholding of food. The child may be trained in this manner at the clinic and at a related school, and, more important, the parents are taught these techniques as well, so they can continue the method in every aspect of the child's life. Autistic children, for example, do not notice anyone or listen or answer questions or even look up when called. The Greenfelds learned how to say to Noah, "Look at me," and to reward him with potato chips or cookies if he did so:

> So whenever Noah starts jumping on the couch as he prepares to take off into his own world, or starts to prance-dance around a room, I shout "Look at me." If he persists in his self-stimulation, in his inappropriate behavior, I admonish him with a sharp "No," a "Stop it," and even an occasional smack. . . .

This is to be the basis for learning of a more complex sort. Fritos and pretzels can reward a child for simply looking at his parents because his parents' approval has not previously been a reward: the child has lost, or never had, such an awareness or interest in the parents, or, by extension, other people. It is somehow appropriate that the rewards should be of such a simple, pathetic nature, because the disruption of development that afflicts these children is similarly simple, basic, and pathetic. And it is also painfully heartbreaking that from these parents, with all their richness of knowledge, experience, and feeling to give, their child will accept only a potato chip.

Anyone with a sense for the complexity of mind, the power of will and desire, and the beautiful intricacy of the psychic network, may be offended by this method: using cookies and Fritos to force the unfolding of self seems repugnant, appalling, inhuman. After a century of advances in psychological knowledge and psychiatric treatment, this way of treating a mentally-ill child may strike the reader not only as disagreeable but, more, as inadequate. Like many others, Mrs. Hundley insisted on knowing *why* her child was autistic and would not adopt a method of training or treatment which concentrated on autistic *behavior* rather than causes. Some object to the very idea of training through such specific rewards and punishments. Pavlov and the salivating dogs come hideously to mind, rats in a maze, monkeys typing, circus animals exhibiting their learned behavior. And what would Wordsworth say—is this to be the fountain-light of all their day, the master-light of all their seeing?

Operant conditioning is not so easily dismissed, however; it does offer something definite to be done, and its effects begin to follow soon after; this should not be minimized, especially if one considers the child in a family setting. Perhaps both the parent and the child are also relieved by the apparent simplicity of the goals and rewards: a parent using this method to teach a child to do a puzzle is not saying, "I want you to be an autonomous person fully relating to me and the world by speech and response," but, more modestly, "If you put those shapes together into a puzzle, I'll give you a cookie." The method can be learned and used with some success by almost anyone; medical degrees are not necessary nor is psychiatric or psychoanalytic training. The possibilities of dissemination are great; parents have learned about it through reading, have learned to use it from other users, and it can be used effectively by those who are close to the autistic child. The parents, who have continuous responsibility for these children, and continue to care for them, constitute a large force waiting to be properly employed. Therapists are notoriously busy, and terribly limited in number compared with the need for their services, while the parents already exist, already know the child and his puzzling significations. As Mrs. Park observed, parents work for nothing, and do not have to be paid $50 an hour for their services. Surely, it is the most economical use of scarce resources for the professionals to train the parents to work with their children, and to provide them with a method that can be learned by ordinary people. As the editor of *The Exceptional Parent*, a journal for parents of handicapped children, observed: "Most professionals have not recognized that the experts who can really help these children are their parents." Surely it is foolish and counter-productive to alienate these parents who are so necessary to their children, to make them feel that they harm rather than help, especially when

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in so many known instances it was the parents' work with the child that prevented massive regression.

Before disdaining the mechanical model of the mind and self implied in operant conditioning, the reader should recall that this is a method for helping children who are ill to have some kind of life in the world. It is not a philosophy of education for children who are well. With the exception of spontaneous, unexplained recovery, these autistic children will not become normal, no normal intact child will step out of the autistic state. Neither are these children to be compared with neurotic or disturbed children for whom the familiar therapies are appropriate. And the reader will recall that those therapies are not always successful. Even the most perceptive therapy of play-analysis, as developed by Melanie Klein and her associates, or the work done by Bettelheim, Anna Freud, D. W. Winnicott, and others, while impressive in the individual case histories, has been on quite a small scale: Kanner's observations were based on many years of work, but mainly on eleven children; Bettelheim's, in *The Empty Fortress,* grew out of work with only forty-five young patients, not all of whom improved. The autistic syndrome is still too recently known about, and the therapies too limited, for much conclusive evidence of amelioration or cure. Many children have improved remarkably under operant conditioning; whether their achievements are sustained and durable, whether they generate further growth, is as difficult to measure as the continued health of "Erna," "Raoul," "Hans," "Rita," and the rest, from those early reports of child analysis. Mrs. Park's "Elly," now thirteen, has so far improved as to be able to go to Girl Scout camp, to speak in more normal though idiosyncratic fashion, to go to school, and to participate in the life of her family. Other children have been able to enter school, sometimes at grade level, and to show a kind of improvement which their despairing parents would never have believed possible. Devoted parents who share the results of their work with other parents of autistic children are justifiably encouraged to believe that their efforts are worthwhile. The chances of any therapy succeeding with autistic children is limited, because even though used by the most gifted therapists, the therapy cannot make up for the child the time lost in acquiring skills and knowledge and social responsiveness, so that the outlook is by no means promising. If an autistic child's behavior can be modified, however, he is already less remote, more connected with others. A child whose behavior can be affected by others is immediately capable of affecting others by *his* behavior. And this, presumably, is one of the things the illness is about, if it is about anything.

Otherwise, the child is left in isolation. At first Kanner thought psychotherapy was useless for autism, because he had had no success with it. Bettelheim and other psychoanalysts believe that intensive one-to-one analysis can perhaps over an indeterminate period of time help some autistic children; his school, however, is a research laboratory for all sorts of emotional disturbance in children, not only autism, and for this reason children with a variety of difficulties are desirable. Should the Greenfelds have waited several years until Noah at five or six would be eligible for one of the six or eight "autistic places" at the Orthogenic School? And if he were not, what then? And what should they have done while waiting?

THE Greenfelds did not mythicize or idealize their child's illness, or believe that the disaster was needed to give meaning to their lives, or adopt a viewpoint which would let them think the child was happy above the battle in his other world. The number of parents in similar situations who have done so is quite large; in fact, these are the themes of countless books written by parents of handicapped children. For example, Paul West's *Words for a Deaf Daughter** is just such a poetic identification with his young child's affliction, entering into her small world with all the gifts of a mature imagination: he sees her as *une princesse lointaine* engaged in her private rites, he summons all culture, all history for her setting, and throughout the entire book, he addresses her in a poetic second person, sustaining it in an uncanny, disturbing way. The whole effort represents an impulse toward resolution and transcendence, of course, and the reader can support the impulse even if its expression is agonizing.

Other parents of handicapped children view the affliction as something their own lives, or their family life, required, as a burden which turns into a spiritual opportunity. This theme is quite pronounced in the innumerable books of recent years, and in articles published in the mass media, which present incredible stories of the way parents have coped with their situations. Sometimes these disasters gave them the chance to see how precious life itself was to them, or how good people could be, or how faith can move mountains. Although the difficulties were nearly insurmountable, and the emotional cost incalculable, these parents always felt that what they were doing was worthwhile and that they would be ready for any burdens God asked them to bear. I mean such stories as *Ginny: A True Story* by Mary Carson,† her mother, which tells of a child brutally injured in an accident and brought back to life by skilled doctors and by the patience and faith of a devoted mother and family, or the stories of children with cerebral

* Harper & Row, 1970. See the review by Johanna Kaplan in the January 1971 COMMENTARY.

† Doubleday, 1971.

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palsy whose parents undertook the arduous patterning regimen prescribed by the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, such as *Todd* by David Melton,* or *Run Away, Little Girl* by Marilyn Segal,† or *This is Stevie's Story* by Dorothy Garst Murray.** These stories all trace the parents' response to a spiritual task, and recount their efforts to bring a child to walk, talk, go to school, or live normally after brain damage has been diagnosed. Sometimes it takes a number of years, but the parents do not give up. Unlike spiritual autobiographies, their stories are told not by the afflicted one himself, but by those who stood by and helped him transcend the affliction. The Greenfelds resisted adopting such transcendent views about themselves or about Noah's autism. Noah is simply a burden, even if a cherished child, and even if the pain of his illness doesn't entirely erase all their happiness. The father's life as a writer, the mother's as a painter, their marriage, their future, are all blighted, and forever, by what has befallen them.

Is there any meaning in this tragedy? Is it even a tragedy, or is it something else? In his early fatherhood, Greenfeld himself had had thoughts about his sons as the children of the racial future, and then, after Noah's condition became apparent, these thoughts turned into a horrible epiphany, but not with any more extended meaning. The Greenfelds do not feel chosen by God for this burden, they are not to be tested by it, they are not Job or Abraham or the saints. And, although they deeply want to care for their child and will seek any cure available, it is because he is their child and they love him, not for their exemplary role, or his. They do not interpret very much of the cultural fact, perhaps because the disaster is so close and they are so tired. At most, Greenfeld suggests that society should bear more of the responsibility.

It is a difficult question, how far society can be implicated in such situations, or what is meant by raising the matter at all. Society cares for its ill and damaged ones, its old and helpless ones, its criminal and hopeless ones. Arthur Bremer, who wanted to assassinate George Wallace, wished that society had protected him from himself, and killers often leave notes asking to be stopped before they kill more. Should there be a social agency, a social intervention for every trouble? Many people think so: homes for the elderly and the sick, day-care centers for children, prisons, rehabilitation centers, facilities, programs, institutions for every known affliction. "Society," of course, means all of us, and those we designate to act for us. When people speak of society's responsibility in the matter, say, of autistic children, the argument becomes unclear: in what way was "society" responsible for *causing* the condition? Or is it only that, whatever the cause, "society" should be asked to take responsibility for coping? It would be hard to say that Noah's autism was *caused* by society, without assuming a very complex chain of causation, and the Greenfelds would probably resist society if Noah were to be placed in one of society's institutions at society's direction. Would the Greenfelds accept "society's" jurisdiction and authority in other respects, in the education of their other, normal, child? Society insists on saving or trying to save each infant, even those born prematurely, and will intervene to prevent parents from abusing or abandoning their children. Does that imply either an obligation to care for each child, and each adult who was once a child, or a right to intervene in their training? Society already requires that children go to school, have smallpox vaccinations, polio shots, drivers' licenses, and so on; should it prescribe in other aspects of development, character, morality?

Parents of ill children see this matter very much from their own point of view, of course, and any such troubled parent must be forgiven for pressing society's responsibility in the affliction, if only because such parents are burdened and victimized too much by crude, cruel attributions of guilt. This seems very evident in the story by James Wechsler of the terribly sad life and suicide of his son, *In a Darkness*,†† and of all the years when there seemed to be no help for this gifted young man whose schizophrenia only grew worse. The succession of ineffectual hospitalizations, analysts, and other therapists, and their seemingly deliberate rejection of the Wechslers's wish to help, makes for a horror story which should never be repeated. Inevitably, if parents feel helpless and bewildered, and are not given any guidance or permission to help, they will come to feel that society is responsible, if only because "society" has in effect told them they are useless. In the stories offered by parents who did find a way to help, it is hard to feel that "society" could have done any better than it has done in the person of the parents themselves. None of those children, Todd or Ginny, or Mindy, or Stevie, or Debbie, or any of the rest, would have made progress without the incredible devotion of parents who felt that *their* help made the difference. And it is truly extraordinary: the amount of time which a mother must devote to patterning exercises, to eye exercises, to supervising the breathing exercises, the crawling, and the rest of the plan devised by Doman and Delecato; the amount of time, the energy, the daily unbroken repetition, the devotion and the remembering and the organizing of friends and neighbors to help in the patterning, and the effect on the rest of the family. Equally remarkable is the same kind of dogged, powerful, single-minded commit-

* Prentice Hall, 1968.
† Random House, 1966.
** Abingdon Press, 1967.
†† Norton, 160 pp., $5.95.

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ment of a mother such as Mrs. Park or Mrs. Hundley, or Mrs. Greenfeld, or the countless unknown parents providing every day a kind of attention unimaginable in any treatment center.

WHOEVER thinks about it will not find in autism or other children's disabilities a clear cultural meaning, or a readiness of analogies and correspondences. The social hypotheses about the disaffection of youth, the decline of the family, the erosion of authority, the transformations of sexuality, are less available in the matter of schizophrenia, especially childhood schizophrenia. When the autistic syndrome was first advanced by Kanner, it seemed that the illness arose primarily in families of high intelligence and professional accomplishment, that it did not appear among the very poor or the very rich. Obviously, the absence of speech in an intelligent professional family could be a cruelty of tragic proportions, and intelligent middle-class parents would of course be the ones to persist in seeking treatment for their mute child.

Gradually, however, the sample began to appear self-selective, not reliable; refined methods of diagnosis revealed an unsuspected incidence of autism throughout the population. Furthermore, there was reason to believe that many conditions previously diagnosed as something else were in fact autism, and that perhaps the whole history of strange children in the past, in legend as well as in fact, bore some relation to autism; there were the stories of wolf children, wild and almost inhuman children whom primitive people thought were brought up in the forest by wolves but whom Bettelheim believes to have been autistic children abandoned by their parents, or lost, and there were reports such as Dr. Itard's early 19th-century discovery and attempts to educate the "wild boy" of Aveyron in France. Every country reports autism, and, with increased communication, there is no doubt that unknown numbers of children, who in earlier times would have escaped scrutiny, will be found to be autistic. Further information and more sophisticated diagnostic testing disrupts the social analogies, and significance becomes more elusive.

Hypotheses about the relative prominence of constitutional and environmental factors in the etiology of autism have also been affected by biochemical research, by the development of behavior therapy, and by other developments in the treatment of schizophrenia. The more that is learned about early infancy and its instinctual dramas, the less easily do cultural analogies serve, because the same instinctual scenario has such varied denouements in the same culture. Thus, even if it should turn out to be demonstrably true that some profound maternal estrangement, coupled with birth injuries, caused autism, whether in the rejecting mother or the rejecting infant, or that there was a failure of projection and introjection reinforced by somatic conditions, or a repression of persecutory anxiety, or, more simply, that for some reason the infant perceived a parental wish that he not exist—these are all hypotheses in current use—the significance would still be unclear. So many children have been unwanted, so many mothers have been withdrawn or unresponsive, so many have tried actively to do away with their babies, there are so many neglected or mistreated infants and children, that these causes are both unsatisfactory and irrelevant. That is, one wants to know more about the forces in the infant's life which would *oppose* the development of autism; that is the question of greatest interest. As against other psychic illnesses, there is no useful relation between the causes of autism and the remedy for it, and understanding does not bring relief. Just as if someone is severely injured in an accident, a reconstruction of the accident will not help his recovery, nor will understanding of the cause or course of the disaster. The question really is one of rehabilitation rather than understanding or reconstruction of events.

The autistic child's greatest need may be not for an understanding which depends on all sorts of mental developments unavailable to him, but for skills which will permit him to have a life and perhaps even a livelihood. His parents need no theory or therapy for themselves, but advice, techniques, and suggestions from other parents, practical knowledge about schools, camps, books, and other developments, of the sort described in the publications and meetings of the National Society for Autistic Children. For such children, the great value of the operant-conditioning method may be its implicit assumption that they are trainable, and that some kind of rehabilitation into the world may be possible. Skills are often denigrated in favor of "genuine feeling," as if human expression required no learning or mediation, but we can see that in some sense it was through failure to acquire skills—motor skills, for instance—that autistic children often first became vulnerable, and that their hope lies in those who think they are still able to acquire skills even though so much time has been lost. Ancient masters always took very seriously all the exercises and skills necessary to achieve certain states of feeling, but modern people are more likely to dismiss these "artificial" and "mechanical" techniques in their fondness for "communication" and "dialogue" and "naturalness" and "autonomy." Operant conditioning has often been condemned for failing to evoke such qualities.

Still, quite a few people who are not schizophrenic, who have no "special" language, no word taboos, whose words and deeds do not require translation, nevertheless on occasion may not "know what to say," may be "speechless," may not

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be able to "say what they think," or to "say what is on their minds." They may be "at a loss for words" or "say the wrong thing." Verbal undertakings are not simple; we are repeatedly drawn back to renewed attempts at precision, despite previous failures or confusion, to "the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings." None of us uses unmediated *his own* language; in fact, language is something we agree to use and develop skills for, it doesn't belong to anyone or have anyone's own imprint on it. The language of schizophrenics has been studied as a special instance of a theory of signs. Vocabulary and grammar provide ways of discussing the painter's, architect's, musician's art as well as the writer's. The interest in ordinary language and linguistic analysis in philosophy, the questions of meaning, and the meaning of meaning, of ambiguity, or other minds, all suggest that the language we have agreed to use is not a set of simple equivalents, and that "communication" is more easily uttered as a word and wished for as a goal than it is achieved in actuality.

Autistic children, if they use this language at all, do not use it very much as others do, although painstaking interpretation may reveal unexpected precision, as Mrs. Park demonstrates in her report on "Elly's" language and as Mr. West indicates in Mindy's word-list. This doesn't mean that autistic children or schizophrenics are really sane and the rest of us are mad, or that our language is insane. It isn't; neither is it the exact equivalent of feelings. What convinces these children to give up their own language in favor of ours? Not the example or encouragement or earnest solicitation of parents and teachers, but, rather, Fritos, pretzels, and tiny marshmallows. And perhaps more rigorous neutral exercises emptied of content. Just as the autistic child can learn to say "heptagon" more easily than "mother" or "I," so perhaps the child could learn "The King asked the Queen and the Queen asked the dairy maid . . ." more easily than ask for anything for himself. Verbal exercises, simple verbal forms, conventions can be learned. They are not equivalent to real, genuine speech, of course, not the same as the child's own autonomous expression of will and desire, in the same sense that Zen exercises may not be the equivalent of the states of being aimed for but are not therefore useless. It seems better to leave for the moment the troubling question of anyone's *own meaning and intention,* for (in the words of Wittgenstein):

> . . . . if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable, then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be—unutterably—*contained* in what has been uttered.

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Updike, Malamud, and the Fire This Time

Robert Alter

TAKING certain striking passages out of context from some recent American novels, one might conclude that white writers in this country have been engulfed by a wave of racial paranoia. To begin with, there is the elegantly dressed black pickpocket in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* who exhibits his ropy male member to the panicked Mr. Sammler as an ominous lesson in "lordliness." Still more emphatically, Bernard Malamud's Willie Spearmint, the black novelist in *The Tenants*,* stirs an acrid literary brew in which black guerrilla squads round up "wailing, hand-wringing Zionists" to finish them off with pistols or, in another version, stab "Goldberg" to death and taste his sour flesh. In the last confrontation of the novel—or is it only the protagonist's final fantasy?—Willie's slicing knife unsexes Lesser, the Jewish writer, at the very moment, to be sure, when Lesser's ax cleaves the skull of the black man. John Updike's *Rabbit Redux*,† moreover, demonstrates that these visions of menacing black power unleashed are not restricted to Jewish writers. Updike's working-class white Protestant protagonist, contemplating the eerie, manipulative Negro fugitive he has taken into his home, suddenly sees him as "evil," mentally comparing him to the backyard cesspool he used to poke into as a boy. "Now this black man opens up under him in the same way: a pit of scummed stench impossible to see to the bottom of."

The relationship, of course, between a novelist's fantasies—specifically, the acts and attitudes he ascribes to fictional characters—and his actual views, or those of any group with which he could be linked, is bound to be ambiguous, fluctuating, difficult to chart. Sociological and political perspectives on literature are surely necessary if literature is to be taken seriously as an act of public discourse, but these perspectives easily do violence to the literary work by too crudely connecting fictional invention with social fact. A case in point is John Murray Cuddihy's "Jews, Blacks, and the Cold War at the Top,"** an essay that builds upon *The Tenants* and upon a survey of Saul Bellow's work a general argument about Jewish literary intellectuals, their attitude toward black writers, and the problems both groups have with the novel as a form of self-expression. Cuddihy's intellectual earnestness has led him to research the backgrounds of his subject with admirable thoroughness, but in his avowed orientation as "a sociologist of literature" I think he is seriously confused about the implications of Malamud's novel as well as about the larger issue of literary form and group identity.

In *The Tenants*, one recalls, the novelist Harry Lesser, living on the top story of an otherwise abandoned tenement building, is joined on the floor below by Willie Spearmint, an aspiring black writer. The two men pass from mutual suspicion to a distinctly uneasy friendship to violent enmity. Lesser gains the affections of Willie's Jewish mistress; Willie burns Lesser's manuscript; Lesser responds by chopping up the black novelist's typewriter with an ax; and all this concludes in that ghastly vision of mutual destruction. Cuddihy's reading of the novel turns it into a virtual allegory of what he conceives as a cultural struggle between black and Jewish writers for a "room at the top." The struggle is less for power than for status, each of the two minorities seeking cultural preeminence by pressing its claim to the prestigious role of supreme Victim. Lesser is the established figure—he has already published two novels, one of them a critical success—Willie the interloper. Lesser, according to Cuddihy, is willing to accept the black newcomer only on condition of keeping him literally and figuratively below himself. At Willie's invitation, the Jew tries to teach the black writer something about literary form, ultimately frustrating and infuriating the younger man through his advice. This proffered aid, in Cuddihy's view, is primarily a self-protective affirmation of special privilege on the part of the Jewish writer: "Black experience is eligible for registration in cultural terms only if it assumes proper fictional form. Lesser and his colleagues [presumably, Jewish literary intellectuals in real life] are the self-appointed custodians of these rubrical and civilized matters." Reflecting on Willie Spearmint's resentment against the exigencies of form, Cuddihy contends that the "Wasp art-novel" (*sic*) is in fact "eth-

* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 230 pp., $6.95.
† Knopf, 407 pp., $7.95.
** *Worldview*, February 1972.

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nically emasculating" to Jews and blacks alike, and he tries to illustrate this thesis by reviewing the career of Saul Bellow. What Cuddihy describes as the "central insight" of that career is a perception that East-European Jewry, in the tenor and texture of its distinctive experience, is not *Romansfaehig*, not susceptible of representation in the modernist novel. Thus, *Augie March*, because it adopts the sprawling, episodic qualities of the picaresque novel, is viewed as an authentic attempt to achieve an appropriate ethnic narrative form, while Cuddihy can assert of the Bellow who wrote *Herzog* that "he has 'sold out' to the good-taste canon of Western modernism."

To set straight the most basic issue first, the notion of a Wasp art-novel is mere nonsense, and it vividly illustrates the absurdity in the new fashion of attributing all cultural facts to ethnic origins. The so-called art-novel, most literary historians would agree, begins with Flaubert, a French cultural Catholic. If one of Flaubert's influential heirs, Henry James, was in fact the scion of a patrician Protestant New England family, the Flaubertian conception of painstaking formal structure and minute attention to narrative viewpoint was equally taken up by Conrad, an expatriate Pole, and most signally by Joyce, a writer who beyond any consideration of faith remained profoundly Irish-Catholic.

On the other side of the question, the literary production of thoroughly Protestant writers is hardly so homogeneous as Cuddihy implies. "The Protestant ethic," he claims, "—impersonal service of an impersonal end—passes imperceptibly into the Protestant aesthetic of restraint and self-effacement. As self-importance and vanity violate the Protestant ethic, exhibitionism and ostentation are the core lapses in the Protestant aesthetic." Wherever this Protestant aesthetic existed, it could not have existed in a once-Protestant country called the United States, or else what is one to make of Poe, Melville, Mark Twain, and, above all, Walt Whitman as American writers, of Faulkner as the major American modernist, of Henry Miller as a self-conscious heir to Whitman and to the Protestant spiritual tradition? Indeed, Bellow's explicit intent in *Augie March* was not to write distinctively ethnic fiction but, on the contrary, to make a mainstream American novel out of Jewish immigrant experience, and precisely for that reason he drew on Mark Twain and Whitman as models for the free-swinging looseness of his narrative form and the flamboyant expansiveness of his style.

Assuming an identity between a putative Protestant aesthetic and the modernist novel, Cuddihy implies that the Jewish protagonist of *The Tenants*, as a self-appointed custodian of civilized matters, has unwittingly "sold out" to the dominant Wasp norms—like Saul Bellow and, presumably, like Malamud himself. The novel, however, makes it quite clear that Lesser criticizes the black writer's work not on the basis of some external norm or fixed model of literary form but for the self-defeating contradictions within the work itself. Willie's weakness for inflated rhetoric, as Lesser sees it, violates the "simplicity and tensile spareness of his sensibility." His impulse to articulate a revolutionary position often sits uncomfortably with his attempt to make sense of his personal experience. Far from wanting Willie to write a Wasp novel, Lesser is simply asserting that art as communication must have internal coherence, that every literary work must integrate the appropriate means to its own specific ends. Not to make this demand is to surrender literature to a chaos of self-indulgence underwritten by a mystique of ethnicity. A few years ago, Richard Gilman was suggesting that no white critic had the right to judge the work of a black writer. Now, Cuddihy's more general argument about ethnic form would turn our national literature into an archipelago of ethnic and racial islands, each speaking according to its own mysterious laws, not to be judged or assimilated by others.

What of the claim that *The Tenants* reflects a conflict between Jews and blacks over cultural status? Obviously, Malamud as a novelist whose own rise to prominence coincided with a vogue of Jewish writing in America must have been very conscious in his choice of subject of black writing as a new literary wave. Nevertheless, there is no evidence in the novel that Lesser conceives his relationship with Willie as a competition for literary preeminence, though the interaction of the two *races* is a central concern. To begin with, the supposed vying for the role of chief victim is nowhere present in the novel. Black victimhood cries out from every page of Willie's writing, but Lesser unhesitantly grants this prerogative to the black writer while his own work is in no way concerned with the Jewish role as victim, and he makes very little of that role outside his work. Indeed, the only references to past persecution of the Jews are introduced by Willie in the anti-Jewish fiction he writes after the deterioration of his relationship with Lesser (he calls one story, "The First Pogrom in America").

More important, there is no real status for the two writers to struggle over, and Lesser's residence on the top floor of the tenement as it is actually described in no way allows the figurative sense of a "room at the top." On the contrary: the tenement is a trap, a self-elected prison-hole, a womb-tomb, still another embodiment of the claustrophiliac vision that informs Malamud's whole *oeuvre*. Lesser's shabby apartment, despite its elevation, is not different in meaning or psychological function from Morris Bober's grocery store in *The Assistant*. Like Bober, Lesser is bound to his place by chains of habit, by fear of the outside world, and finally by the unbending

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integrity of his commitment to a futile calling.

This psychological deadlock of self-incarceration is stressed in the novel by Lesser's maddening refusal of the landlord's astronomically mounting cash offers and of his mistress's urgent imploring to leave the apartment. He finally renounces material security, love, even the most basic physical safety, in order to stay where he is. "The bribe has increased but this is where Lesser's book was conceived more than a decade ago, died a premature (temporary) death, and seeks rebirth. Lesser is a man of habit, order, steady disciplined work." Willie Spearmint is an apprentice to Lesser not so much in the art of writing—Lesser ultimately fails to teach him anything about that—as in the ardor for self-enclosure. The Negro is a far more obstreperous and hostile disciple than the Italian Frank Alpine in *The Assistant*, but, like Alpine, he finally does become a "Jew" in Malamud's special sense—a man who renounces the great world, accepts the confines of some personal prison, takes up a self-punishing labor of Sisyphus in which the act of commitment itself becomes its own ultimate end. What seems to underlie a large part of Malamud's work is a private obsession presenting itself as a universal moral vision,* and this is nowhere clearer than in *The Tenants*, where the urgently topical materials finally fall into precisely the pattern of the fiction he was writing ten, fifteen, and twenty years ago.

THE peculiar nature of the white-black confrontation in Malamud, and the limits of its range of implication, will become clearer through a comparison with the encounter between the two races in the new Updike novel. It is intriguing that two such different writers should have produced simultaneously novels in which the plotting of the racial situation is so similar. By an uncanny coincidence, the white protagonists of both novels even turn out to be exactly the same age, thirty-six, and to have the same first name, Harry. (Updike's Harry Angstrom is German-American, so the name is as probable for him as for the Jewish Harry Lesser.) In each case, a vague, passive, ineffectual character is discovered trying to hang on to a viable sense of self in the eroding terrain of his early middle years, sustaining himself with the fading memory of youthful success (Lesser's first novel, Rabbit's brilliant career as a basketball player that antedates the action of *Rabbit, Run*). Lesser, of course, has his dogged sense of vocation; Rabbit has only his ticky-tacky house in a low-cost suburb, his passionless marriage, his long-haired adolescent son whom he does not understand.

In each of the two novels, a black man insinuates himself into the dwelling place of the white. Each of the Harrys sees his black visitor, spun out of the inferno of the ghetto, as a wild, hostile, threatening figure who also somehow manages—through the white man's guilt?—to exercise a weird attraction. Both Angstrom and Lesser become willing if profoundly ambivalent hosts to their black guests, entering into a relationship of teacher and disciple, though in *Rabbit Redux* it is the white man who is the disciple. In each novel, there is a white woman sexually shared, in rather different ways, by the black and the white man. In each case, the protagonist's persistence in the role of host becomes a crazed acquiescence in his own destruction. "My God, Lesser," cries Levenspiel, the distraught landlord, finding his tenant in bloody battle with Willie, "look what you have done to yourself. You're your own worst enemy, bringing a naked nigger into this house. If you don't take my advice and move out you'll wake up one morning playing a banjo in your grave." Much the same advice is given Angstrom by his two menacing neighbors, Brumbach and Showalter, who come to warn him that he had better get the black man out of his house if he doesn't want serious trouble. Finally, each of the black visitors is involved in an act of fiery destruction toward the conclusion of the action. Willie burns Lesser's novel, the anguished work of ten years, so that the Jewish writer sees himself "buried in ashes," while Updike's Skeeter flees the Angstrom house in a suspect midnight blaze that destroys most of Rabbit's material possessions as well as the pathetic girl Rabbit had not quite managed to love.

Cautiously, one might draw certain general inferences from these similarities of plot. The sustained assertion of black militancy, a decade after James Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time," seems to conjure up for white literary imaginations a recurrent vision of—quite literally—the fire *this* time. Angry blacks force upon white consciousness the bitter knowledge of their collective pain and degradation; in the novels, Willie does this through his writing, Skeeter through his nightly lectures in Rabbit's living room on black history. The white man responds with guilt, a concomitant feeling of obligation, and, above all, with an apocalyptic fear that such suffering must issue in a destructive rage of unimaginable proportion and effect. The female character shuttling between races in each of the novels embodies a renewed insight into the profoundly sexual nature of the guilt, fear, and attraction that exist between the two races. In both books, the principal characters carry out bizarrely altered reenactments of the historical sexual exploitation of blacks by whites. In *The Tenants*, the white man "emasculates" the black, takes his woman from him, though she is in this case white, first attracted to her lover by his blackness. In *Rabbit Redux*, the white girl, Jill, is forced by Skeeter to assume

* I am indebted on this point to the insights of Marilyn Fabe, who is working on a psychoanalytic study of Malamud's novels as a doctoral dissertation.

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the historical role of the black woman in a sinister psychodrama where he plays the "white" male, sadistically exploiting her, humiliating her before her lover, making her worship his sex.

Finally, a central awareness most clearly shared by both novels is a white failure of nerve, or at least a flagging sense of white identity, in the face of black assertiveness. Rabbit and Jill, a generation apart, are in their different ways both rudderless people, caught in the powerful undertow of the black man's vehement self-affirmation, and the same is true of Irene in *The Tenants*. Even Lesser, with his habit-bound commitment to the writer's vocation, has only a vague sense of identity, unmoored in the world of experience outside his manuscript, and his black visitor's certainty about self, however manic, exerts its magnetism on him. Willie makes this general point succinctly in describing his relationship with Irene: "She had nothing she believed in herself. I straightened her out in the main ways because I gave her an example, that I believed in my blackness." The white man's fading belief in himself and in his inherited values is brought forth with comic poignancy in one of Lesser's dreams, where, clad in raffia skirt and anklets, he dances before the thatched huts of an African village. Suddenly his decrepit father appears:

> "You should be ashamed to dance like a *shvartzer,* without any clothes on."
> "It's a ceremonial dance, papa."
> "It's my own fault because I didn't give you a Jewish education."
> The old man weeps.

ALTHOUGH these tentative generalizations about the common implications of the two novels may have a degree of validity, a closer examination of the imaginative texture of each book will suggest that the two writers make very different use of the same racial preoccupations. In order to convey this difference in texture, I would like to set end-to-end two descriptions of city scenes that occur at the beginnings of the two novels. In each case, we see an older neighborhood in an Eastern city scarred by the characteristic contemporary blight of demolition and parking lots. Here is Lesser, stepping outside his apartment building:

> In front of the decaying brown-painted tenement, once a decent house, Lesser's pleasure dome, he gave it spirit—stood a single dented ash can containing mostly his crap, thousands of torn-up screaming words and rotting apple cores, coffee grinds, and broken eggshells, a literary rubbish can, the garbage of language become the language of garbage. . . . Next building on the left had long ago evaporated into a parking lot, its pop-art remains, the small-roomed skeletal scars and rabid colors testifying former colorless existence, hieroglyphed on Levenspiel's brick wall; and there was a rumor around that the skinny house on the right, ten thin stories from the 1880's (Mark Twain lived there?) with a wrought-iron-banistered stoop and abandoned Italian cellar restaurant, was touched for next. Beyond that an old red-brick public school, three stories high, vintage of 1903, the curled numerals set like a cameo high on the window-smashed facade, also marked for disappearance. In New York who needs an atom bomb? If you walked away from a place they tore it down.

To this one might usefully compare Updike's initial description of downtown Brewer:

> Now in summer the granite curbs starred with mica and the row houses differentiated by speckled bastard sidings and the hopeful small porches with their jigsaw brackets and gray milk-bottle boxes and the sooty ginkgo trees and the baking curbside cars wince beneath a brilliance like a frozen explosion. The city, attempting to revive its dying downtown, has torn away blocks of buildings to create parking lots, so that a desolate openness, weedy and rubbled, spills through the once-packed streets, exposing church facades never seen from a distance and generating new perspectives of rear entryways and half-alleys and intensifying the cruel breadth of the light. The sky is cloudless yet colorless, hovering blanched humidity, in the way of these Pennsylvania summers, good for nothing but to make green things grow. Men don't even tan; filmed by sweat, they turn yellow.

The obvious difference between Updike's omniscient overview and Malamud's rendering of the scene through his character's point of view has broad ramifications in the way each novel handles its larger subject. What engages us in the passage from *The Tenants* is the manner in which it catches the special inflections of Lesser's thought and, at the very end, of his speech as well. This means, however, that we get nothing of the outside world that does not somehow mirror the struggling novelist's peculiar predicament. Indeed, the world outside his writer's refuge is first seen simply as a dumping-ground for his physical and literary wastes. The only details he picks up of the cityscape around him are reminders that his own fifth-floor hermitage stands under the shadow of the wrecker's ball. The external reflections, in fact, of his own plight are even more specific. A demolished building leaves a hieroglyphic testimony of its colorless existence —which is about what can be expected from Lesser's life, from his career as a writer. A neighboring tenement is lingered over momentarily partly because Lesser thinks it once may have given shelter to a novelist, Mark Twain. One even suspects that the condemned old school with the smashed windows echoes a sense the protagonist has of his own anachronistic bookishness in a landscape of urban violence, ascetic devotee of a Flaubertian concept of the writer's craft in a

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high-decibel age where activism passes for art.

In the Updike passage, on the other hand, there is a pervading sense of the city scene, the houses and streets with their human population, even the weather, as a coherent ensemble expressing a whole mode of life at a particular time and place. The informing authorial intelligence, personifying porches and cars, sunlight and open space, has an emphatic interpretive view which gives the scene its sharpness of definition, makes it mean something as a moment in social history. Thus, the final observation about people turning yellow instead of tanning hovers somewhere between plausible fact and literary conceit but serves as a firmly cinching summary of the feel of existence in this lifeforsaken town.

Updike has a keen eye for those minute details which remind us just how such a milieu looks, which suggest how its parts fit together—the granite curbs starred with mica, the sooty ginkgo trees, the speckled sidings on the row houses, the jigsaw brackets and gray milk-bottle boxes on the porches. The Malamud passage does have two analogous details—the curled numerals on the school facade and the wrought-iron banister of the tenement stoop—but these are not part of a panorama or descriptive catalogue, and in any case they show a degree of specification quite untypical of the novel as a whole, which is notable for its abstractness. Although urban "renewal" is going on in *The Tenants*, pot is smoked at parties, and blacks are talking of revolution, Lesser's tenement dwelling, scantily furnished and sketchily rendered, is virtually interchangeable with Manischevitz's flat in "Angel Levine" (1952) or Harry Cohen's in "The Jewbird" (1963); and Lesser himself, essentially unmarked by history, could serve as a stand-in for S. Levin, Fidelman, Henry Freeman, Leo Finkle, any of those hapless, stranded Malamud protagonists vaguely longing for a new life, for achievement, and above all for love.

By contrast, *Rabbit Redux* is that rare thing, a convincing sequel, largely because the Harry Angstrom of the Eisenhower years portrayed in *Rabbit, Run* (1960) reappears here thoroughly a creature of his changed time, caught in its social crises, shaped by his class and surroundings as they have evolved into the late 1960's. For this reason, the frequent allusions to current news events are genuinely functional, unlike the lamentable *Couples*, where an unintegrated use of the same device seems a mere affectation of historical realism. Bringing to bear an old-fashioned novelist's instinct for the defining details of ambience, Updike places the thirty-six-year-old Rabbit in a precise social context linked to the recent years of relative affluence, deepening national malaise, and mass-produced inauthenticity. For example, the contents of Rabbit's living room, surveyed in the early morning light, have a "Martian" look: "an armchair covered in synthetic fabric enlivened by silver thread, a sofa of air-foam slabs, a low table hacked to imitate an antique cobbler's bench, a piece of driftwood that is a lamp, nothing shaped directly for its purpose, gadgets designed to repel repair, nothing straight from a human hand, furniture Rabbit has lived among but has never known, made of substances he cannot name, that has aged as in a department store, worn out without once conforming to his body." Elsewhere, the novel is punctuated with reminders of a national era vanished, the most remarkable of these being a virtuoso description of a sparsely-attended baseball game, the magic of an American ritual turned into an empty charade because "the poetry of space and inaction is too fine, too slowly spun" for this crowd of the late 60's, and "the old world of heraldic local loyalties" recalled in the team insignias has become alien, almost forgotten.

Updike, it seems to me, is at his best when he is being a rather traditional kind of novelist—which means broadly when, as in both *Rabbit* novels, the clarity of his social perceptions is not unduly vexed or obfuscated by stylistic mannerisms. I do not mean to suggest in making this general contrast between *Rabbit Redux* and *The Tenants* that social realism is intrinsically a superior mode of fiction. The thinness and schematism, however, of Malamud's new novel could lead one to infer that his real strength as a writer is in the short story rather than the novel because his vision is too private, too detached from the realities of society, his imagination too inclined to fable and parable, for the needs of novelistic elaboration of character, event, and setting. At any rate, I think none of his five novels equals his best short stories in originality of conception and persuasive force, while *The Tenants* seems to me clearly the weakest volume of fiction he has published. As a fabulist of the frustrated, isolate self, as a wry fantasist of grubby failure, Malamud has invented brilliant things. In *The Tenants*, the insistent presence of the new black militancy impinges upon his imagination, but one senses his limitations here precisely because in the end he can only make of a crisis in national consciousness grist for his private mill.

Willie Spearmint duly recalls for us ghetto squalor and degradation, Southern persecution, black anger and pride, but all this finally dissolves in Malamud's claustrophilia, his fixation on the allures of withdrawal and sordid self-interment, and that preoccupation has no intrinsic connection with the racial situation. Here is Lesser near the end of his sad story: "Nights he lay nauseated in piss-smelling hallways, sick, grieving, the self to whom such things happen a running sore." The nastiness of this has to be explained in terms of the loathing Malamud must feel toward the self-defeating masochistic character he is con-

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demned to invent again and again. It has nothing to do with the conflict between black and white. The running sore of the self—a self unrepresentative in its special neurosis—fills the canvas of the novel, blurring the delineation of racial relations within it. Willie Spearmint, as I intimated earlier, becomes another Lesser, like him withdrawing from the world into a dilapidated trap, cultivating a destiny of self-immolation, wallowing in dirt, and at the end, again like his Jewish mentor, dabbling in excreta (each searches daily through the garbage cans outside to fish out the rejected drafts of the other). The ultimate moment of mutual slaughter is less a novelistic ending than an idea, a means of symmetrically finishing off both self-destructive characters since there is no way out of the claustral morass they have entered. The schematic conception of the ending is reflected in the neatness of the reversal by which the black man, having felt himself threatened with emasculation, castrates the white as the latter smashes the brain of the aspiring black writer. The whole working-out of the plot is so caught up in Malamud's private preoccupations with filth, womb-like enclosure, the inability to love (Lesser hopes to learn that by writing about it), and a writer's fear of losing creative élan, that it is extremely difficult, as Jacob Korg, reviewing the book in these pages,* somehow managed to do, to read it as a resonant prophetic warning about the actual relationship between the races.

With *Rabbit Redux* the case is rather different. Updike exhibits, I think, a certain boldness in placing at the center of a novel about our time an average, unintellectual, politically conservative, working-class figure. By successfully representing the confusions, anxieties, and blind longings of such a character, he manages, in a time-honored tradition of the novel, to bring us the "news" about something going on in our society, enabling us to see a familiar phenomenon more sharply, from within. Indeed, if a German-American laborer (laid off in the end by automation) can be granted title to ethnicity, one might contend that this is the first notable novel about the much-discussed anguish of the neglected ethnic amid the upheavals of the Vietnam years, the revolutions of the young and the black. I find the rendering here of one ordinary American's feelings toward blacks generally persuasive because those feelings are represented without authorial attitudinizing, as a visceral perception of the black's otherness. Harry Angstrom is physically uncomfortable in the presence of blacks yet fascinated by their seemingly impenetrable alienness; hidebound by prejudices of class and race against blacks yet paradoxically open to their suffering because, after all, he cannot entirely muffle his awareness that they are men like himself. "Talking to Negroes makes him feel itchy, up behind the eyeballs, maybe because theirs look so semi-liquid and yellow in the white and sore. Their whole beings seemed lubricated on pain." In the bizarre character of Skeeter, Updike strains the idea of black otherness to the limits, Skeeter at times seeming more a projection of Rabbit's fantasies than an independent personage. For me, however, the strategy finally works through its extremeness: the conventional Angstrom is hypnotized into a trance of passivity by the black man's sheer *outrance*, compelled to a dazed attentiveness quite unlike his ordinary mental habits by the psychological and rhetorical contortions of the utterly alien black.

But this is not, one can be thankful, a homiletic novel about the conversion of a bigot. Rabbit is deeply shaken by his extended encounter with Skeeter, literally and figuratively burned by it, but he plausibly remains more or less what he was. At the end he still supports the war in Vietnam, still has scorn for Americans who defame America, still feels prejudice toward "Spics" (his wife's lover is Greek-American) and others who have dark skins or foreign origins. His loyalty to the idea of America remains, but now, after Skeeter's bitter lectures, it is shot through with doubts about what America has really been. His sense of distance from blacks is almost the same, his fear of them surely enlarged, but he also sees them more clearly as human beings, understands in some way the exigencies of their troubled condition.

What emerges most prominently from Rabbit's confusions is a sense of complicity. He can no longer see the nation altogether as a division between "we" who are all right and "they" who make the trouble, for he has reached some inner knowledge that we all have a hand in the trouble. The result, for better or for worse, is not a resolution but a new kind of confusion, a free-floating guilt that as yet has no proper outlet. Harry Lesser's self-victimization is a matter of individual obsession; Harry Angstrom's self-victimization bespeaks a publicly shared feeling of guilt. Implicated in violent destruction, he thinks of himself as a criminal, wonders why the police don't arrest him, and with his sense of punishment coming to him he has an open ear to Skeeter's new gospel for the defeated: "Chuck, you're learning to be a loser. I love it. The Lord loves it. Losers gonna grab the earth, right?"

His attraction to the fire this time is of a piece with the relief so many frustrated, socially and emotionally trapped Americans must feel in the outlet of violence, in glimpses of an apocalyptic end. "You like any disaster that might spring you free," his sister tells him, and the jibe strikes home not only for the predicament of one Harry Angstrom. In Updike's *Rabbit* novel of the late 50's,

* May 1972.

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the prisoner of family, class, and place could still dream of winning freedom by getting into a car and heading for open country. Now the only way out he can readily imagine is through the burning down of the whole house: "Freedom means murder," Rabbit muses moodily during a visit to a Negro bar, "rebirth means death." Mere flirtation with the apocalypse, however, reinforces feelings of impotence and guilt, and it is on this uncertain note that the novel appropriately concludes. Rabbit is back again with his wife, unable yet to make love to her after their pained separation, unsure what their new relationship will be or what he will do with the terrible shocks of new awareness he has absorbed during the *Walpurgisnacht* of his strange ménage with Skeeter and Jill. The dialogue between him and his wife before they drift into an exhausted sleep is curt, impatient, restive. The first voice is Rabbit's:

"I feel so guilty."
"About what?"
"About everything."
"Relax. Not everything is your fault."
"I can't accept that."

As a way of bringing a novel to a close, this may seem indefinite, hesitant, denying us the satisfactions of a resolution—even an apocalpytic resolution like Malamud's—but it says something that sounds right about where we are now. After all that has passed in political and literary history, it is reassuring that some novels still perform that prosaic but necessary task.

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Reykjavik vs. Miami

Jack Richardson

STRATEGY, the mode of human thought that seeks effects instead of causes, provided the real drama of the past summer. Miami Beach, a perfect setting for the febrile maneuverings of politics, and Reykjavik, in its removed position from a great deal of ordinary human commerce, a well-chosen site for a chess confrontation, were the places in which the dramas took place. In both cases it was television that provided outlets to an audience and analyses of the happenings, so that the plans of professionals, whether floating down in abstract symbols from the north or rising in rhetoric and human images from Florida, could be grasped by an audience of interested amateurs. In the afternoon, on Channels 13 and 10 in New York, one could watch Fischer and Spassky thread their way through the challenges of a Sicilian Defense, and in the evenings, on the major networks, there were the attacks and parries of democratic political selection. It was a chance to study the human mind being, in turns, dramatically devious, brilliant, dull, fatally flawed, and courageously tenacious. Soon, if one followed these events closely, it became apparent that, whether one listened to an International Grandmaster or a political scientist, there were areas much too complicated for human thought to exhaust, and the dangers of a passed pawn, like the risks in an innovative plank in a party platform, can only be roughly calculated before events themselves bring a resolution to prior speculation.

At first glance, it might seem that chess and politics, even allowing for the intellectual caprice of seeing them in terms of dramatic forms, have only a superficial resemblance. It would be, I believe, as strained a comparison to liken Fischer to an anti-Establishment McGovernite as it is to see in chess a mirror for all human activity. The fact that conflict, sacrifice, and compromise are apparent in both enterprises means very little when one considers that in chess wooden figures are being manipulated as opposed to human beings in politics. An obvious difference certainly, but it is best to stop the enthusiastic analogist quickly. Pawns sacrificed in a gambit bear no grudges; this cannot be said, for instance, of the Daley delegation. Again, no one will blame Boris Spassky if he changes his views on the Alekhine Defense after having lost a pawn to Fischer in less than a dozen moves when it was played. However, McGovern's abandonment of the $1,000-per-person gambit has already cost him at least this writer's vote. In short, there is little to forgive a winner over the chess board; in politics, achieving office often means little more than a designated period of absolution.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think of chess simply as a closet drama, a meaningless mental exercise that has nothing to do with the practicalities of life that so abound in politics. All of us, from *patzer* to Grandmaster, who followed the struggle between Fischer and Spassky, have in varying degrees come to understand not only the complexities of the game itself but also the complexities of mental response to the game's problems. When the American, Paul Morphy, the first truly modern chess player, heard himself referred to as a "mere chess player," he suffered the anguish any of us might feel at being termed frivolous and gave up playing. To the ordinary man who had never experienced the delight of a five-move combination or a surprising sacrifice, chess long remained a symbol of non-utility. If the politician was considered too much a part of the world's realities, the chess player was thought to be a facile escapist, pouring energy into black and white squares, caught up in the quaint, otherworldly jargon of his game.

Well, the dramas of Miami and Reykjavik somewhat changed all that. As far as involvement with reality is concerned, it would be hard to compare most of the Democratic candidates favorably with Bobby Fischer. Indeed, weighing the Platform Committee debates against Fischer's wranglings with the Icelandic Chess Federation, it would seem that chess is on the threshold of proving itself every bit as capable of consorting with base instincts as has politics. While experts around the world waited poised in front of analysis boards, Bobby resolutely continued to demand more and more worldly goods and comforts; while in Miami, Democrats seemed intent on proving that the old *Realpolitik* could be eschewed in favor of populist idealism. Of course, as the convention unfolded, it was evident that pragmatism and expediency had not been completely excised from the Democratic party, but for a time it did seem that the Democratic party was exiting from the world we know and that Bobby Fischer, being coaxed and cajoled by everyone from Henry Kissinger to Latvian chess teachers, was leading his long repressed profession very much into it.

BUT moralizing about dramatic events is never good criticism. What struck me, a casual chess player and a committed citizen, as I sat in front of my television set through long afternoons and longer evenings, was that, for all the

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rich spectacle provided by a loose alliance of people intent on grappling with the issues of war, poverty, racism, economics, and the social destiny of women, it was the rigidly confined contest in Iceland that was usurping more and more of my interest. As I have said, I am not a fanatical chess player, and the nuances between the Slav and the Semi-Slav Defense are not what I would normally find gripping. Also, in my dramatic aesthetic, there is a fondness for rich, human detail, a fondness that no amount of expert analysis could make up for in settings that were thousands of miles away from the game's champion and challenger. Add to this the point of view of self-interest, the fact that the resolution in Iceland was hardly going to affect my life at all, whereas what went on in Miami might result in extreme alterations in my social habits, and I had strong cause for wonder about my attitude.

Making certain allowances for mandarin tendencies in my personality, I discovered after a little thought that my reaction was not so difficult to understand. For one thing, the Democratic convention, for all its quotas and denunciations of the "old politics," was too full of predictability to compel for an extended time. If those on the floor were the new representatives of a fresh constituency, they behaved very much like all those they sought to replace. The political mind was pulsating with plans for power that only a TV commentator could fail to grasp immediately. The "new faces" soon wore sleek, professional expressions, alternately smug when success seemed near and properly concerned for America's fate when it seemed that a rules amendment they favored would be defeated. And everywhere those celebrities, from the worlds of politics and entertainment, who don't seem to understand how tiring they can become or how their insights and anger can be grasped by a reasonably intelligent mind without constant reiteration.

Now certainly I don't wish to imply that there is no intelligence within the Democratic party. But, watching its convention, I felt that the mind was again being constrained, that whatever adventures it was being allowed were lost to the main drama shown to the American audience. Here, after all, is supposed to be the largest concerted effort on the part of a democracy to define its moral attitudes and to prophesy how those attitudes will stand the test against all strains future events might lay on them. However, as one watched the doings in Miami, one had to feel that hardly any of even the most likely variations that the future might play against their pronouncements had been thought out. One looked and felt that events would overwhelm this gathering, even as they do you and me, not because it was tragically excessive, but because it was morally overconfident, certain that it would improvise its way through the darkest vagaries of the human spirit. Of course, it might be answered that this is the nature of democratic politics, that its form is dramatic because it is vague and superficial, allowing detail and conflict to be provided by the accidents of the popular will. This may be so, and this would make one more reason why I took refuge in the alternative method of planning provided by a game of chess.

I HAVE mentioned above that the real uses to which the political mind is put are seldom given much public scrutiny. Therefore, politics may be an exciting game to play, but it is tedious to watch, since only the most routine intellectual notions are ever dressed up for public display. In chess, the opposite obtains. Watching the chessmen being moved as Spassky and Fischer played, one felt that the very marrow of thought had been reached and one could almost feel the minds of the participants throb as a delicate position was probed or an opponent's miscalculation was seized upon and exploited. In fact, one was inclined to wince every now and then at the nakedness of the thought involved, every blemish revealed and instantly annotated for the world to muse upon. So many times a blunder would change the course of a game, and, in a way, this evidence of frailty caused as much wonder as did the obvious examples of chess genius that appeared in every session. For a blunder in the chess world is something more than a mere mistake: it denotes an egregious error, a flaw that not only costs the perpetrator his chances to win a game, but reminds him, in his quest for perfection, that he is subject to the humblest mental infirmities. No rationalization can excuse it, for it is as palpable and as enduring as the chess player's fame. The excitement when one of these lapses was teletyped to the studios where the experts had congregated was a result of mixed feelings. A hero had suffered a little death, and one didn't know whether to rejoice or lament over yet one more proof that there is no such thing as human absolutism.

But if errors that must be lived with provided a tragic notion of fatalism to the chess procedings, calculation and creativeness imbued them with a balancing amount of exultation. Fischer's unremitting accumulation of small advantages, his instinct for positional weaknesses that hardly anyone else could detect; Spassky's tenacity and ingenuity in defense, and his will to fight after all the world's experts pronounced him doomed—these qualities, substantiated by hundreds of moves during the period of twenty-one games, gradually created, even in the ignorant, an awe commensurate with the pity felt for the moments of weakness.

And then there was the unexpected, the twists in the old plots of each opening and defense. For example, Spassky's underdevelopment of his knight the second time Fischer's queen went marauding into territory forbidden her by chess theory. This was a move that occasioned disbelief on the part of the Masters and Grandmasters who analyzed for us on television. It was, at first, doubted that the move had been transmitted correctly, and yet, as Arthur Bisquier said later, it turned out to be a maneuver that "might very well toll the death knell" for a line of attack that Fischer had long favored. For in some dozen

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moves later, Fischer's queen had been lost, an event that, to say the least, happens very rarely in Grandmaster chess. Generally, caught in romantic myth, we believe that one who breaks with tradition must be rewarded. Here, at least, was a concrete example to the contrary.

Finally, to the dramatic technique. Like most others with only a slight acquaintance with chess, I had believed this technique to be wholly logical and schematic, a product of mental oddity where victory went to the mind best equipped for analysis. This may well be true on the lower levels of chess playing, but once one reaches the stratum on which a Fischer or Spassky plays, another factor enters: intuition. Thus in a game that *a priori* we know must be dominated by deduction, even the greatest players must rely on hunches and, trusting to their instincts, leap into darkness. There is never time during a game for an exhaustive analysis of a complicated position. Even lifetimes would not be sufficient at present to prove conclusively that at a certain point in a game one move should be preferred to another, and so even in a world composed of only sixty-four squares, there are enough shadows to frighten the pure rationalist and add tantalizing ambiguity to dramatization.

In the end, there is a compelling aura of mortality about the game itself, for no matter how one wishes that its variations were inexhaustible, it is not in the nature of things for them to be so. The great Cuban player, Capablanca, was premature when he said that the possibilities of chess had already been exhausted, but he was theoretically correct. Chess is a finite system, and it therefore implies no contradiction to say that the human mind will one day exhaust it. Of course, in its perversity, that same mind will then invent a more complicated challenge for itself. It might even turn fearlessly to the problems of politics so that it can be assured, barring universal obliteration, eons of unresolved analysis and untidy dramatics.

CHINA

"Having pondered the population data reported by the Chinese themselves and having speculated on the trends in China's vital rates, we arrive face to face with the inevitable question: just what is the population of the People's Republic? If the Chinese themselves have apparently lost count of their vast population . . . shouldn't it be sufficient for the rest of us to acknowledge that China has by far the largest population of any country and leave it at that? Perhaps. But our penchant for precision, our fascination with other sides of Chinese economic, social, and political developments, our curiosity and delight in playing academic guessing games, all require something 'more scientific,' something that at least suggests authority and authenticity." From *Every Fifth Child: The Population of China* by Leo A. Orleans. $8.50

"Taiwan is a place where much of life is carried on in full view of the neighbors. Religious ceremonies, marriage processions, and the elaborate rituals of death seem designed to draw crowds of onlookers. In the villages, routine chores are done in the doorway within chatting distance of several neighbors; child-training takes place where the children are, which is to say, outdoors in all but the heaviest rains; and sooner or later, family conflicts are brought out of the house to be judged by village opinion. It is impossible *not* to make observations and eventually to ask questions about what is observed. . . . This book about Taiwanese country women has grown out of these casual observations." From *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* by Margery Wolf. $8.50

"When all is said and done, two sets of more or less opposing behavior patterns, institutions, and beliefs can be found coexisting in all Chinese villages. One is in broad terms cooperative and aggregative; its effect is to weld a community together. The other is self-regarding and segmentary; its effect is to emphasize the divisions and highlight distinctions. Which of these tendencies prevails, and to what extent, depends on circumstances, some of them immutable (e.g., origins, climate, soil), others subject to change (e.g., agricultural techniques, crops, government policy). A Chinese community is like a polyphony; its character depends on which voice conveys the theme." From *Kinship and Community in Two Chinese Villages* by Burton Pasternak. $8.50

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Schools and Society

THE GREAT SCHOOL LEGEND. By COLIN GREER. *Basic Books. 206 pp. $6.95.*

THE ECOLOGY OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: AN INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY CONTROL. By LEONARD J. FEIN. *Pegasus. 170 pp. $6.00.*

Reviewed by DIANE RAVITCH

EDUCATION has traditionally been thought of as America's great cure-all. Whatever the social malady, whatever the injustice, whatever the inequity, education has been counted on to set things right. And although schooling is only one variety of education, reformers have time and time again turned to the public schools as *the* agency responsible for molding character, opening up opportunities, sharpening skills, developing mental capacity, and, ultimately, remaking American society along the lines of its egalitarian ideals.

Yet obviously American society has not been remade. In recent years the stubborn persistence of inequality has led to an outpouring of criticism of the public schools. Disappointment and outrage stem in no small measure from a sense of betrayed faith in the redemptive power of education. Through many popular books runs the assumption that the public schools of today are worse than the public schools of the past, that they are failing to do for non-whites what they once did for America's white immigrant poor: namely, enable them to rise out of the lower class. This assumption of past success derives from the traditional progressive-liberal view of the public school as the great agent of upward social mobility, the very symbol of American democracy—a view which was incorporated in the major American histories of education as well as in the standard rhetoric of schoolmen. Little wonder, then, that many contemporary critics have concluded there must be special reasons to account for the widespread failure of blacks and other poor minorities in today's public schools.

Four such reasons have been advanced to explain why today's non-white poor have not benefited as other groups supposedly did in the past from exposure to public education. The first, which (except for the brief Jensenist flurry) was rejected as soon as it was advanced, is that the groups themselves are genetically inferior. The second (and the schoolmen's chief line of defense) is that today's poor are culturally more deprived than other ethnic groups. The third is that the schools have become different: they are more bureaucratic, more rigid, more standardized, and less flexible than they once were. The fourth, usually allied with the third, is that the schools are thoroughly racist institutions and hence incapable of educating non-white children.

Each analysis implies a line of policy. The genetic argument leads to a do-nothing policy, and in any case has found no public proponents. The cultural-deprivation theory has led to requests for more money to meet the special needs of the public schools' clientele. Those who argue that the *schools* have changed for the worse have sought the elimination of bureaucracy and a diminution of the power of school professionals through decentralization (as in the Bundy report). Those who believe, finally, that the problem is institutionalized racism turn to community control as a device for affirming the legitimacy and strength of black cultural life.

During the ferment over the schools in the 1960's, the only possibility which was not considered is the one which forms the major thesis of Colin Greer's book: that the public schools were never as successful in educating the immigrant poor as has been popularly believed. What is especially striking about the picture Greer draws is the similarity between the performance of the immigrant poor in the early decades of the 20th century and that of the black poor today. Greer cites facts and figures, all available in public-school documents, which demonstrate that the rate of failure among immigrant children ranged from 30 to 60 per cent in the big cities. He presents early studies of different ethnic groups to show how school achievement varied consistently among groups, with some (notably Jews) scoring higher than others (notably Irish and Italians). He concludes that a group's success in school depended on the cultural resources of the group, not on the transforming power of the city schools.

The myth that the public schools were once a miracle-working institution needed debunking, if only to bring present-day expectations into line with reality. Unhappily, Greer is not content to rest his case with this point. Instead, he uses the historical material as a club in a free-swinging, angry attack on the "American dream" in general and the public school in particular. Despite his knowledge of the severe limitations of the schools, he too shares the traditional faith in their potential omnipotence. His outrage at past failures carries him to the view that the schools were designed and maintained in order to *prevent* the emergence of social equality.

His theory, in brief, is this: the public schools were created by the middle class as a device to control, contain, and direct the lower classes; they exist to separate the successes from the failures, not randomly, but along class lines. The American rhetoric of equality and social mobility has been consciously used to deceive the lower classes, since there is in fact very little equality or mobility

DIANE RAVITCH *is a Fellow of the Institute of Philosophy and Politics of Education at Teachers College (Columbia) and the author of a forthcoming book,* The Great School Wars of New York City: 1805-1969 *(Outerbridge and Lazard).*

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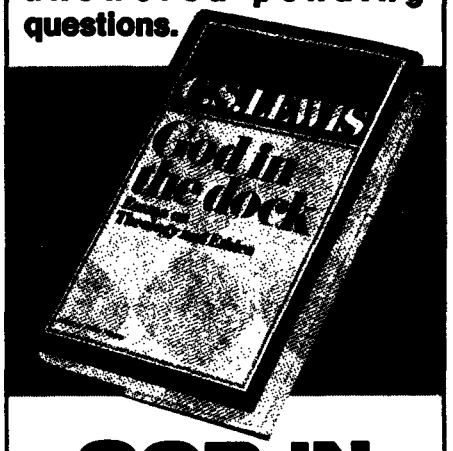

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available to them and never was. Those few immigrant groups, like the Jews, who did succeed in school did so only on the strength of their indigenous cultural traditions. The rise of the Irish and Italians into the midde class should be credited not to the public schools, whose purpose it was to keep them poor, but to the economy, which needed their labor. In any event, those groups who believe they have achieved social mobility really have not, because relatively speaking their economic and social positions have changed very little.

But has there in fact been no social mobility in America? Most immigrant groups have clearly moved up and out of the miserable poverty which was their grandparents' lot in the cities at the turn of the century. There are still large concentrations of white ethnics in New York City, for example, but less than 4 per cent of the city's welfare rolls are white. Greer believes that the white ethnics are *relatively* no better off than their penniless grandparents; yet the worker who has a secure job, a house, a car, and children in college almost certainly would not agree.

Greer has no trouble showing a high rate of school failure among European groups during the major period of their immigration and even during the next generation. Given their poverty, their language difficulties, the extent of undetected physical ailments, the lack of trained teachers, classes which sometimes exceeded 100 children in number, rigid curricula, rat-infested school buildings, etc., it seems a wonder that so many immigrant children managed to stay in school and keep up with their native American peers at all. Those who succeeded, as Greer writes, were often possessed of cultural traditions which strengthened the motivation to lift themselves out of a life of poverty. However, Greer neglects to mention the other side of the coin: the presence in some groups of cultural traditions which discouraged student success and upward mobility. Richard Gambino, for instance, wrote recently in the New York *Times Magazine* that Italian immigrants saw school "not only as alien but as immoral"; boys were sent to work at as young an age as the law allowed, "and girls were virtually imprisoned in the house." The older generation often viewed the schools as a threat to its way of life, rather than as a means to economic and social advancement. Greer notes that Italian-Americans were the least successful in school of all the white immigrant groups, but he does not connect their performance to a disabling tradition. For his own reasons, he prefers to regard their failure as a consequence of the intentions of the public schools. He refuses to accept the implications of his evidence: that 1972 is not so different from 1912 in that ethnic groups still achieve, or do not achieve, in relation to their cultural resources.

Since the burden of his argument has been precisely to stress the relative impotence of the schools as compared with social class and employment patterns—to provide, in other words, a historical setting for the principal findings of the Coleman report—it is ironic that Greer concludes with the ringing demand that the schools become the vehicle of a "radical reformation" and the agents of "major change" in American society. If anything, he seems to have demonstrated that the public school mirrors society and that there is scant historical justification for those who expect the schools to provide the cutting edge of social change.

THE public schools have performed no miracles; they have not created a happy, integrated, utopian society. But would America be more democratic today if there had never been a public-school system? Is there another direction which the public schools should have taken at some stage? Is there another nation, with a similarly heterogeneous population, whose schools have successfully promoted universal social and political equality? Greer offers no alternatives. What he seems most unwilling to acknowledge is that the schools do not operate in a vacuum. They represent one educative institution among many. Their

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successes are rarely theirs alone, their failures are rarely theirs alone.

If, however, they do not operate in a vacuum, the schools nevertheless are the only mass educational agency which is "get-at-able," that is, responsive to public pressure, and in the last few years, public pressure has been very great indeed. One of the most striking aspects of the current debate over the schools has been the call for community control of ghetto schools. Since its genesis as a disputed policy in New York City, where it was born in the midst of bitter controversy, the issue of community control has continued to polarize opinion and raise temperatures. It has been vehemently advocated as a panacea and a "natural right" and just as vehemently denounced as a reactionary power grab.

Given the explosiveness of the issue, it is refreshing indeed to read Leonard J. Fein's dispassionate analysis of the rationale for community control. Fein, who teaches politics and social policy at Brandeis, has written a sober, closely reasoned, and honest account of the potential of community control, both for good and for ill. Unlike most other writers who support community control, Fein refrains from making extravagant predictions of success. Because of his very moderation and fairness of mind, he is persuasive in asserting that there is a serious case for community control, although his candor in assessing its dangers will strengthen the determination of those who disagree with his conclusions.

Fein quite deliberately strips community control of its mythological trappings. It is not, he says, a reassertion of "a lost heritage," since "there never was a time in industrial America when schools in urban areas were definitely controlled by the local community, much less the neighborhood." Nor is community control appropriate to all groups: "One of the most aggravating circumstances . . . is that community control is an urgent question only with respect to black communities, and may, in fact, be a plausible solution only for them." It cannot even be argued, Fein maintains, that community control will lead to improved academic achievement; he points out that there are city schools with excellent students and there are non-affluent, locally-controlled suburban districts which do not produce able students (the difference is a matter of social class and economics, not size or organization of the school district). Fein also acknowledges, unlike most community-control supporters, that those on the other side of the question are not *prima facie* racists; he grants willingly the seriousness of the opposition to community control, which comes in the main from those who identify with the universalist, liberal tradition in America.

Fein is equally direct about the dangers inherent in community control. Since most parents prefer to leave education to "the experts," and since citizen participation in school politics is usually low anyway, schools could end up being controlled by tightly-organized factions, rather than by the community as a whole. He is also aware that the controlling group might impose its own orthodoxy: "In general, the smaller the society, the less opportunity there is for deviance, whether political or cultural, the more the majority exercises subtle—or explicit—tyranny." To those hoping to recapture the warmth of the small town, Fein sounds a note of caution: "In return for a major sacrifice in liberty, a sacrifice which many people are perfectly willing, and even anxious, to make, the small community offers social support, a sense of belonging, an alternative to the uncertainties of autonomy. Yet those who would reflect nostalgically on the good old days of solidarity should bear in mind the treatment of eccentricity in those days, in those places."

Fein himself considers all this an acceptable price to pay for the building of a sense of community—a task which in his judgment it is appropriate for the schools to perform. His commitment to community control is thus based on what he calls "the central conclusion of conservative theory"—that "the loss of community is a desperate and tragically serious loss." He

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unhesitatingly rejects the liberal tradition, which, by denying the value of ethnicity and group identity and by insisting on the virtue of color-blindness and individuality, must bear responsibility for the rootlessness and anomie of modern mass society.

The educational justification that Fein offers for community control is the likelihood that an ethnically homogeneous school will propose a curriculum which is tailored to the special aptitudes of the group. He cites a study in which four groups—Jews, blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Chinese—differed consistently on four mental-ability tests (verbal, reasoning, number, and space). Each group showed a definite pattern, higher for its middle-class children than its lower-class children, but nonetheless internally consistent. Jews, for instance, scored much higher on verbal than on space tests, while for Chinese children it was the other way around. Fein, who believes that the schools should "encourage each group in its unique pattern," calls this study a "powerful argument" in favor of community control (though one might make an equally powerful argument against allowing the schools to institutionalize cultural differences, which raises the absurd specter of ethnic tracking).

It is important to recognize that Fein is not a pure advocate of community control. That is, he does not believe that every community should define its boundaries and then be given free rein. On the one hand, he fears that *white* community control is likely to become a cover for racism; this is why, despite his basic agreement with the theory of community control, he is actually interested only in black community control. On the other hand, he strongly disapproves of imposing restrictions on those blacks who prefer the existing public school system, and so he stops short of advocating the creation of wholly autonomous black community school districts. What he proposes is that, alongside the regular public schools in the community, the state subsidize the establishment of black parochial schools: "a genuinely private system managed by the community with very little auditing by the state." What blacks want, he writes, is not just better schools, "but also the opportunity to develop an essentially private, or parochial, curriculum." Since blacks are too poor to create these schools, and since the state bears responsibility for their poverty, the state has a "special obligation to except the Negro community from the general prohibition on state aid to parochial institutions."

These parochial schools would coexist in the same community with traditional public schools. Black parents could choose to send their children either to a public school, where the development of black consciousness was ignored, or to a publicly-supported parochial school, where the values of the black community were specifically inculcated.

The problems with Fein's proposal are obvious, the major one of course being the unlikelihood that black parochial schools, whatever their special claim, could win full governmental assistance. It is a battle that Catholics have been unable to win for over a century. The analogy is interesting, however, for it suggests a comparison with a similar historic struggle for public funding of parochial schools which occurred in New York City in the early 1840's. At that time, it was decided by the legislature that public money could not go to any school in which there was sectarian teaching. In response, the Catholics, though desperately impoverished as a group, created their own school system. Fein does not carry the analogy this far, but the Catholic example suggests that if there is sufficient black determination to have independent schools, then the absence of government funding will not prevent their establishment.

But even if the scheme itself were feasible, who would define the values of the black community? The black community, like the white community, is made up of many disparate factions. Should the parochial school teach the values of the separatists, or the upwardly-aspiring middle class, or the black professionals, or some

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other group? (The Catholic schools never had this problem since their values were those of the Church.) If the question is to be settled by vote, one can foresee considerable confusion in a community with two school elections—one for the public community school board, the other for the parochial community school board. Choice, which Fein staunchly maintains is important, is retained, but the concept of *community* control is stood on its head.

IN *The Ecology of the Public Schools* Fein has elevated the debate over community control to a plane where serious discussion has at last replaced screaming. For those who support community control, he has built a coherent ideological base. For those who oppose it, he has compiled as good an analysis as can be found of the price which fraternity may demand of liberty.

National Character

TEN VERSIONS OF AMERICA. By GERALD B. NELSON. *Knopf. 201 pp. $6.95.*

DEMOCRATIC HUMANISM AND AMERICAN LITERATURE. By HAROLD KAPLAN. *University of Chicago Press. 298 pp. $12.00.*

THE NOVEL OF MANNERS IN AMERICA. By JAMES W. TUTTLETON. *University of North Carolina Press. 304 pp. $10.00.*

Reviewed by QUENTIN ANDERSON

PROFESSORS of American literature often seem to assume that the books they study afford not simply a means but a sufficient means of understanding us. Other inviting convictions attend this one; for example, our classics do more than exhibit our inmost meaning, they are also somehow constitutive of the character, or the hoped for character, of the nation. Still more tempting is the idea that American literature, if we adopt just the right attitude toward it, will prove the most useful, or the only useful, engine of social change.

In 1934, R. P. Blackmur, thinking of the current efforts to make literature serve the revolutionary cause, remarked of Henry James that for him "art was enough." In 1964 a Blackmur admirer, Laurence Holland, published a book on Henry James in which he maintained that it was precisely through his utter surrender of himself to literary form (a sacrifice he describes as "redemptive") that Henry James became great, and concluded that the ultimate function of these forms was to serve the society—to reveal how wrong our conception of marriage was, how wicked capitalism was, and so on.

This is not quite as complete an inversion of Blackmur's view as it seems, since the belief that literary forms ought to be examined in isolation and the belief that art could be "enough" for its practitioners were never as firm or as dissociated from social convictions as we sometimes say they were. (John M. Bradbury, author of a book on the Fugitives, says of literary formalism that it was "quasi-religious.") But when the power of art to define or even to change the society was explicitly revived by Mr. Holland and others it was augmented by the mystique of Coleridge's "esemplastic power." The imagination was loosed on the society as a power to do good.

Gerald B. Nelson and Harold Kaplan exhibit a belief in the sufficiency of art to define us, and Mr. Kaplan adds the belief that it can change us for the better. James W. Tuttleton doesn't agree on the first count, although his attempts to escape the assumption that art furnishes a complete diagnostic view of our society are a little clumsy. The critical tradition in which these three got their training hasn't put them at ease with the general culture. For them American literature is very nearly all.

Mr. Nelson's *Ten Versions of America* is a pure case of the conviction that literature is sufficient to define us. His ten versions are offered by ten characters (beginning with Hemingway's Jake Barnes of *The Sun Also Rises*) whose plight he uses to encode his own loathing of "the American Dream." He frames his book with what I believe to be a misreading of William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, eliding Williams's emphasis on leaders and an organic society. Like Whitman's all-embracing love (of which it may well be an inversion) American self-hatred is not content until it touches both shores of the continent, and catches up the whole past as if it were a single moral disaster. How we can have been so monotonously awful without the intervention of divine power is a matter for wonder. I don't suppose that Mr. Nelson would hold that ten or any other number of characters could be used to make a similarly inclusive characterization of England, France, or Italy. But if not, why not? What is clear is that by viewing literature as sufficient evidence Mr. Nelson has acquired the privilege of seeing the national past and the national character *en bloc.*

Both Mr. Kaplan and Mr. Tuttleton are anxious to establish the social usefulness of American literature, but their starting points are almost opposed. In Mr. Tuttleton's case the social importance of the novel of manners is that it lends imaginative reinforcement to what we most need, a sense of the "web of connections that define and enrich the self." Cooper, Howells, Henry James, and Edith Wharton contributed to our awareness of these connections by writing novels of manners. Lacking it, we are now trying to write novels without employing any "theories of society."

> Consequently, though we still acknowledge the persistence of the class structure, still detect the signs of class and status, still experience the influence of institutional structures on our manners, and are still surprised into recognition of the vestiges of ceremony and form in our public life, our novelists do not quite know what to make of it all. We are said to be beyond ideology. But until the intellectual community produces some viable ideas, some conceptual framework within which these diverse social phe-

QUENTIN ANDERSON, *author of* The Imperial Self, *is professor of English at Columbia University.*

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nomena can be organized and interpreted, what is happening in our time may not be wholly expressed by our novelists. And we will get more private symbolic romances, more disembodied antinovels, and more nonfiction novels.

Mr. Tuttleton's case for the existence of a live tradition in the novel of manners is well presented, and not overargued, but it depends too much on Sinclair Lewis, John O'Hara, John P. Marquand, James Gould Cozzens, and Louis Auchincloss to be quite persuasive.

Mr. Tuttleton's book is perforce retrospective, since the best books come early; Mr. Kaplan's looks forward. He finds in classic American writers (Emerson, Thoreau, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Mark Twain, and James) an awareness of the meaning of democracy that America has neglected, and modernist literature has obscured. (He is much more down on modernism than Mr. Tuttleton.) In his book American writers hymn what is said to be "immanent" in their work, "democratic humanism."

Mr. Kaplan derives his sense of this term from a number of thinkers, including Martin Buber and John Dewey (who called Emerson "the philosopher of democracy"). The most economical way to explain what he is proposing is to refer to Buber's notion of an I-Thou relationship between two persons. This is the only relationship which does not—as this religious existentialist conceives it—reduce the other person to an "It," a mere categorized object. When we stand in such a relationship each of us is recognizing the infinite possibilities of the other person. For Buber of course the supreme relationship of this sort is with God, but Mr. Kaplan's belief is a humanism, rather grandly qualified as "ontological."

A country committed to egalitarianism requires, according to him, just such a basis for relationships among its inhabitants, and this is precisely what our authors try to supply. In a chapter on Henry James he puts it this way: "The meeting of man with man makes a world and it is, implicitly, the only world." The United States, then, is definable as the scene on which the human imagination discovers that the only escape from a rigid authority on the one side or anarchy on the other is a humanism such as this. He doesn't represent the process as concluded in his writers; they are, like the rest of us, but "half-created" as yet, and literary modernism has stood in the path of our realization of the humanist hope. (Once more literature figures as an effectual social agent.)

Mr. Kaplan's use of "democratic" refers to egalitarianism—as do most of his extensive quotations from Tocqueville—and he is not interested in any existing political system. His use of "democratic" conflicts with another equally odd use of the word long current in discussions of American literature. "Democratic idealism" is a term used to describe the conviction of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman that particular persons,

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and only particular persons, have the power to incarnate and manifest the whole of things. This is a notion both recurrent and definitive in all three writers—although Emerson often retreats from it in late work. In theory it was a possibility open to all—in practice the essays, poems, and lectures of these three revealed the universal through the grid of their individual sensibilities. Since an orthodox philosophic idealist asserts that a single principle lies behind all appearances, he cannot admit a plurality of such powers. But Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman claimed infinitude for the private man. So in these cases Mr. Kaplan has at least one claim to infinitude at hand. But of course these three writers are at their feeblest and most ineffectual when trying to imagine a full-fledged relationship with another person. (The pages Emerson and Thoreau wrote on friendship practically announce the death of society.) Richard Poirier's remark that the Emersonian "I" could never figure in a novel is conclusive. Among the followers of R. D. Laing the contradiction which unites the universal with particular persons alone takes the form of the assertion that we are all Christs—the pattern is most familiar among those most agonizingly isolated, that is, psychotics. So Mr. Kaplan has a problem; it is very hard to believe that this fantasy in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman contributed to the growth of any kind of social order. Mr. Kaplan returns to this question a number of times. I quote one passage:

> It has been reported by several critics, chief among them Lionel Trilling and Richard Chase, that American writers of the classic period had little interest in social realism, the depiction of life styles and manners, the analysis of specific social conflicts. The mistake . . . is to extend this judgment too far, in suggesting that the theme of their work is not man in society. This is precisely the most actively considered theme of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman, but they write in terms of the *first* questions which associate with this theme and not the last. That is to say they write as if the problem of living in society had just been offered to men who were otherwise morally and intellectually complete. These were the men of the myth of America, stepping onto the soil of a new continent and preparing to establish a new society. As such they had no social experience to describe but they did indeed have the most intense interest in the first principles of social relationships.

The terms Mr. Kaplan uses to characterize the positions taken by Chase and Trilling reduce and attenuate their analysis of the relation of our literature to social actuality—I have the impression that society in being is as unreal to him as it was to Emerson. But the startling idea here is that these five writers had somehow never had any "social experience." I am reminded of Samuel Butler's observation that the question "Is life worth living?" is a question for an embryo, not a man. My relation to other people is what made me, if I had none I wouldn't be a person at all. The babe leaps up on his mother's arm in response to her and the world she proffers; there isn't any escape from the conditioned character of our lives.

And what has happened to the founding fathers? The writers Mr. Kaplan is describing would be forced to ban Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* and *The Federalist Papers*; they must have been written in another country since they represent us as fatally conditioned for good or bad by the presence of our fellows. But the question as to how a serious and intelligent man got involved in such massive denials of reality as this can't be settled in this way. He is writing in a tradition of literary discourse which licenses such sentences as "The final object of democratic aspiration is to find an uncategorized humanity." And he doesn't talk this way throughout. I admire much of what he says on *Huckleberry Finn*, about which it has proved very hard to say interesting things.

I BELIEVE that Mr. Kaplan was misled by the critical tradition in which he was reared. The first step was to create a criticism in which the writer took no personal responsibility for his judgments because he assumed that he might extract them, contexts and all, from the works he was examining. The second step was to find these works not simply usable to create an American past, but sufficient, so that art turned out to be enough, all you needed to know. When books contain all the reasons and conditions of their own being they license you to step ashore on the territory of the myths you find in them. The imaginative freedom of the author is conferred on the critic who enters into the work; he can make books constitutive, as in this case, of the inward meaning of democracy. The reader of Mr. Kaplan's book cannot tell whether he would be a "democratic humanist" if he had never read these books; it seems that his advocacy springs out of the works themselves, as if he had no moral convictions of his own.

The consequences of this immersion in the books are stylistically disastrous. Deprived of a place to stand Mr. Kaplan cannot offer anything analogous to what F. O. Matthiessen called a "total complex imaginative response" to a work. We get a sort of ideological patois instead: "This affirmation both criticizes and transcends the alternatives of subversion and repression," a sentence strongly reminiscent of R. W. B. Lewis's *American Adam* and Laurence Holland's *Expense of Vision*, in which the ghostly paradigm of things seems to be at play without any human agent to support it. The texts are dismayingly available; Mr. Kaplan manipulates his writers like a man wandering about in a warehouse full of parlor organs. I quote a passage in which he is discussing Poe's imaginative relation to death:

> The theme in Poe must be correlated with Hawthorne's interest in the patrimony of guilt, with Thoreau's celebration of the bath of innocence and his own hunger for life, or with Cooper's myth of the hero of the woods and the open air, to speak only of Poe's contemporaries. To do so justifies a stress on a special American pattern for this drama of life-and-death antagonists. It is possible to see in Poe a distinctive magnification of the American myth of

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Who knows?

"Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest. Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. . . . He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less. He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land . . . he supplies what wants supplying and checks what wants checking. If peace is the routine out of him speaks the spirit of peace. . . . If the time becomes slothful and heavy he knows how to arouse it . . . he can make every word he speaks draw blood."

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life, stressed as it was in the precarious ancestral experience of revolution and immigration. The life hunger of the immigrant implied an equal nostalgia for the "haunted ancestral halls" and the graveyards left behind.

The breathy busyness of this prose suggests that much is going on, and that much more is going to emerge—but reading on, one discovers that it is actually terminal. Nothing more is going to happen because everything is happening at once, and will keep on happening until the chapter ends. The human agent, the individual voice, is not present.

There is a simple difference between Mr. Kaplan's view of individuals and Mr. Tuttleton's. Mr. Kaplan deals in *persons*, whose only meaningful attribute is their claim to infinitude. They have no age, sex, status, parents, husbands, or wives; they are neither black nor white, rich or poor, clever or dull. I quote from a passage on Henry James: "Like Hawthorne before him he dramatized an experience in which there was only one resort against solipsism, and that is a communication between persons, the failure of which is dramatized in 'The Beast in the Jungle.'" Perhaps Henry James did not find the fact that John Marcher is a man and May Server a woman more than an imaginative convenience in a world of persons. But he was surely taking advantage of the convention that a woman whose love is not returned does not insist. Mr. Kaplan, Emerson, Dewey, Americans all, do indeed care little about what qualifies persons. But in the world Mr. Tuttleton finds in the novel of manners these qualifications matter intensely. The "web of connections" is not between persons but people fatally qualified, creatively qualified, by identities and roles. Literature is written by such qualified people. For that reason it is no more sufficient, no more defining, no more an independent social cause than are the qualified individuals who make it.

During the 19th century and our own, people have been led to contemplate their infinite possibilities in many ways, but two seem in point here. The mode of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman was reportedly joyous. I should object that in their own persons these three acknowledged the desperation which accompanies all claims to infinitude. But I haven't space to argue that here. In the world that I recognize in Mr. Tuttleton's book it is intelligible that Rilke was driven to take the world into himself because he felt that it would, in all its glorious separateness and distinctness, perish if he didn't. This is an instance of the second mode, which admits the pain and terror that accompanies such states. Norman Mailer sees such an imaginative appropriation of the whole burden of actuality as enforced by cultural necessity. But it was Nietzsche, on the very verge of madness, whose beautiful sanity saw most clearly that the territory of infinitude was a human desolation. He wrote Burckhardt that he would much rather have been a professor of history than God.

There is a hidden emotional logic in Mr. Kaplan's book. The claim that art is sufficient to define us amounts to borrowing the acknowledged infinitude of the imagination for social uses. But when we address ourselves to our infinitude we turn our backs on the qualified individuals who live in society. How can we bind them all together again? Why with an "ontological" humanism, one that claims to create the world through getting us to recognize each other's infinitude. This is just one more version of Emerson's democratic idealism. I would rather be a professor than one of these millions of possible gods.

The Siddur

JEWISH WORSHIP. By ABRAHAM E. MILLGRAM. *Jewish Publication Society of America. 673 pp. $8.50.*

Reviewed by ERICH ISAAC

OF ALL the sacred books the Jews have produced, the *siddur*—which might be termed the Jewish Book of Common Prayer—is perhaps the most representative of Jewish life and thought. Unlike the Bible and the Talmud, which at some point were formally redacted and then closed to further changes of any kind, the *siddur* remained an open-ended enterprise, and long after its fundamental pattern and contents were established, it continued to incorporate contributions from various sources. Because it was so singularly "Jewish" the *siddur*, unlike the Bible, could not be appropriated by seceding sectarians or by the so-called daughter religions of Christianity and Islam. Moreover, unlike the Talmud, mastery of which required formidable powers of intellect and perseverance, the *siddur* became the unique possession of the Jewish common man. Historically, its importance in the shaping of the Jewish ethos cannot be overestimated. As Abraham Millgram notes in this excellent and comprehensive study, Jewish life until recent times could be described (in Moritz Steinschneider's words) as "a divine service with interruptions."

Obviously this no longer holds true. If the *siddur* still retains any vitality today, it is a considerably diminished one, notwithstanding the apparent healthiness of the American synagogue as an institution. To be sure, efforts have been made to render the prayerbook more "relevant" to modern concerns, but these have not yielded notable results. The Reform movement's Union Prayer Book of 1895—accurately described by Millgram as a "predominantly non-Hebrew prayerbook which enunciated admirable universal ideals with which none could argue"—is a case in point. It achieved its "relevance" by excising the central concepts of historical Judaism, deleting all references to Jewish particularity, and substituting a liturgy (in English) that elaborated universal ethical principles and ideals. Thus the yearning for national redemption and restoration in the Land of Israel was replaced by the notion of Israel's mission in the world, and the belief in the coming of the personal Messiah gave way to the creed of a messianic era to be ushered in by all men of good

ERICH ISAAC, *who teaches at the City University of New York, is a specialist in the geography of religion.*

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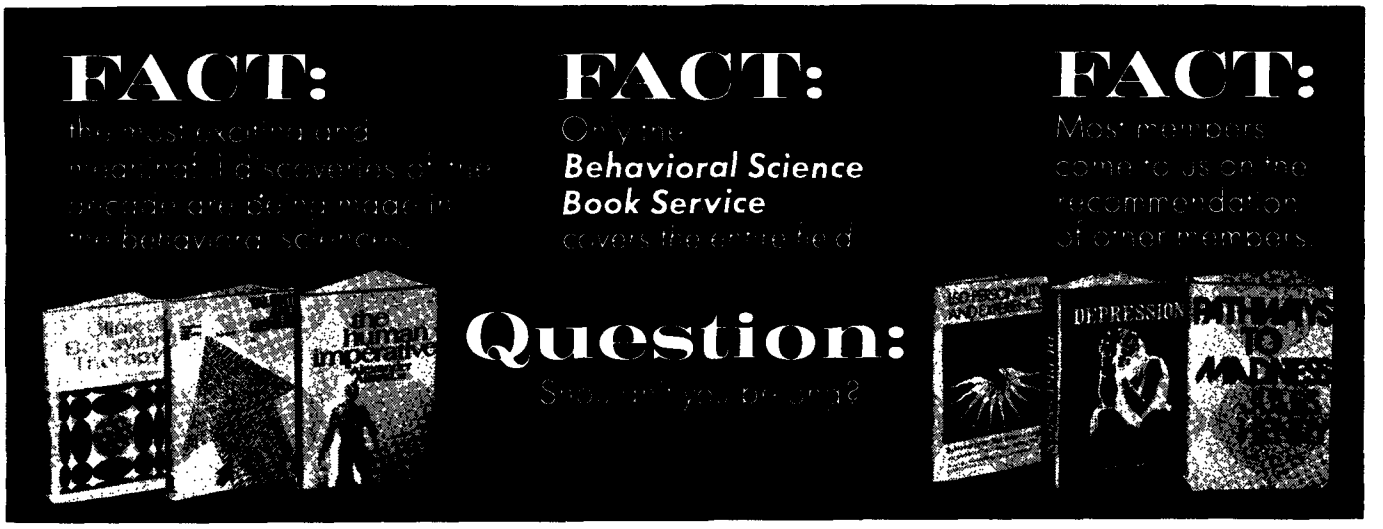

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will. Reform worship, with its homilies on child-rearing, the plight of coal miners, and other social issues of the moment, became, in Millgram's words, "in large measure a recitation of glorious platitudes addressed mainly to the world at large, instead of prayers to the God of Israel."

If the *siddur* has fallen on hard days in America, in Israel it displays greater vigor, despite the fact that the Israeli synagogue plays a much less prominent role as a focus of communal life. New prayers, drawing upon the old sources of faith and composed by religious and literary geniuses like Rav Kook and S. Y. Agnon, have taken their place in modern Israeli prayerbooks. What sets these prayers apart from most of their American counterparts is not only their purity of language—worthy in every way of the best in the traditional liturgy—but also their adherence to the *siddur*'s age-old concerns: the relationship of the people of Israel to God and His world.

Millgram proves an able guide in steering the reader through the innovations which American and Israeli Jewry have brought to the *siddur*, but he is at his best in charting both the distinctiveness of Jewish prayer and the historical development of the prayerbook. A distinguishing feature of Jewish prayer, as he points out, lies in an identification of worship with study. Indeed, the stress on study as a mode of worship may be altogether unique to Judaism. (Millgram cites George Foote Moore: "The conception of individual and collective study as a form of divine service has persisted in Judaism through all the ages, and has made not only the learned by profession but men of humble calling assiduous students of the Talmud. . . .") Historically, prayer and study shared a common characteristic: by focusing attention on texts relating to the idealized conditions of the past (and of the messianic future), they served in a sense to suspend the normal processes of history. Jews dispersed to the ends of the earth not only prayed for the restoration of Jewish national independence and studied laws applicable to a sovereign Jewish polity in the Holy Land; they also recited their prayers in a form that made it appear as if they were *already* resettled in the Land, or indeed as if their habitation of it had never been interrupted.

The *birkat hamazon*—grace after meals—is a striking example of this phenomenon. After the appropriate thanksgiving for food there appears a catalogue of divine gifts to Israel: the Land of Israel, the Torah, the Covenant, the Temple Service, and the promise of redemption, in that order. Although this passage is among the most ancient prayers in the liturgy, its power and immediacy are such that along with everything else in the grace it was retained in its original form, with all verbs in the present tense, in seeming defiance of painful historical realities. Jerusalem may have lain in ruins, the Jewish people may have been scattered in Exile, but the Jew, sitting at his table, continued for millennia (as he still does today) to thank the God "Who *builds up* Jerusalem."

MILLGRAM describes the development of the prayerbook as a process of accretion, as new prayers were continually composed in response to historical events and the exigencies of the moment. For example, the *kedushah* (Sanctification), a prayer inserted into the reader's repetition of the *shemoneh esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions)—the focal prayer of the daily liturgy—orginated in Babylonia under the influence of mystical speculations rooted in Isaiah's description of the celestial chair: "And one [angel] called unto another, and said/Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts;/The whole earth is full of His Glory." Jews outside of Babylonia resisted this mystical interpolation, and for centuries the *kedushah* was not accepted in the Palestine liturgy. However, in the wake of the Justinian Edict (535) and the Church's prohibition of a number of traditional prayers, the *kedushah* came to assume a new importance. The Church had outlawed the *shema* because its declaration of the unity of God was construed as a deliberate challenge to the trinitarian dogma. The *shemoneh esreh* was also forbidden since a passage in it (stemming from early controversies with sectarians) invoked God's wrath on informers, apostates, and Nazarenes. Furthermore, an interdiction was placed on the expounding of any rabbinic teaching during the service. What was left was the right to listen to readings from the Torah without commentary, the recitation of religious poems in praise of God—and the *kedushah*, whose threefold repetition, "Holy, holy, holy," the Church saw as an intimation of the trinity. Jews made use of the approval bestowed upon the *kedushah* to expand it, inserting within the enlarged version significant parts of the forbidden prayer. Eventually, the *kedushah* itself fell under a ban as Church authorities became convinced that the Jews did not perceive the trinitarian nature of their own "trinitarian" prayer; another prayer was then pressed into service which incorporated the *kedushah* both in Hebrew and in an explicitly antitrinitarian Aramaic translation. All these prayers eventually became part of the permanent liturgy.

The prohibition on rabbinic teaching, which remained in effect for a considerable period of time, led to a tremendous expansion in the output of liturgical poetry (*piyyut*). During the Byzantine era the character of this poetry, whose origins go back to the early Talmudic period, underwent a decisive change, as poets now worked to circumvent official edicts, incorporating rabbinic teachings in the form of involved metaphors and vague allusions clear to Jewish congregations of the time but meaningless to government censors. As pedagogy, *piyyutim* written in this way served a necessary function, but they also provided an unfortunate stylistic model, imitated for centuries, that encouraged a high degree of convolution and artificiality. Many such *piyyutim* were later pruned from the prayerbook under the influence of authorities like Solomon de Medina of Salonika, a 16th-century rabbi, who wrote: "It seems to me that it is far better to omit these *piyyutim* . . . since nowadays hardly anyone understands their mean-

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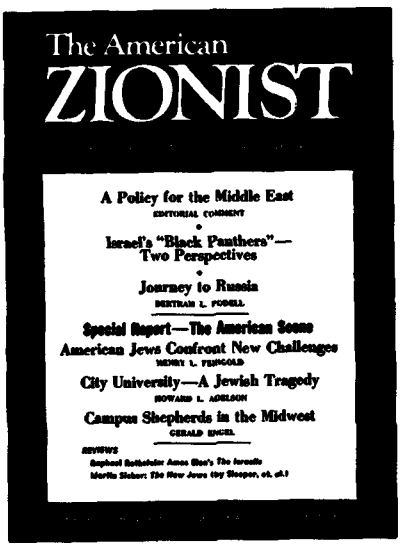

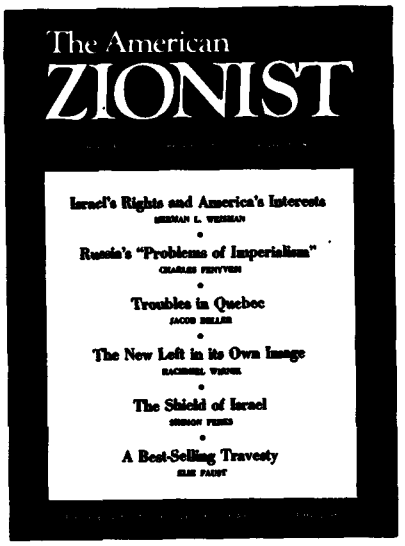

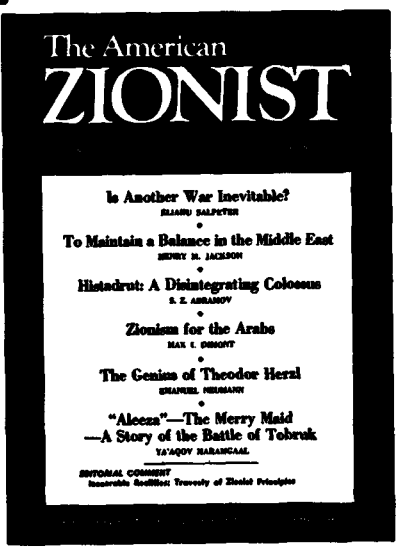

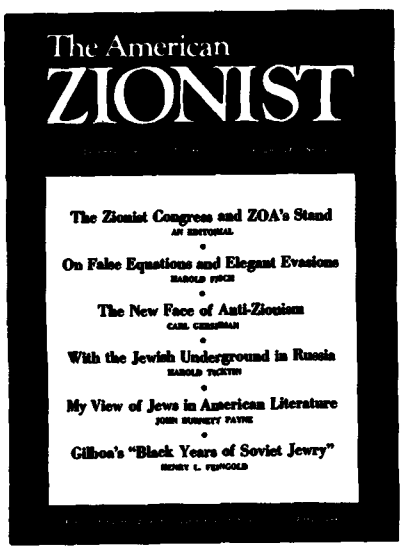

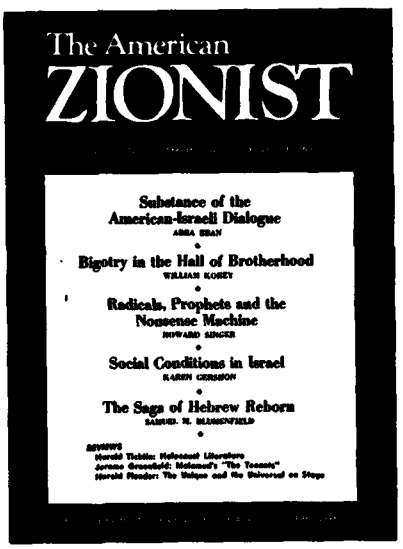

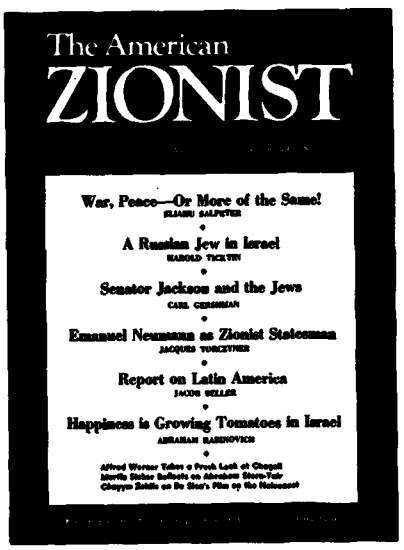

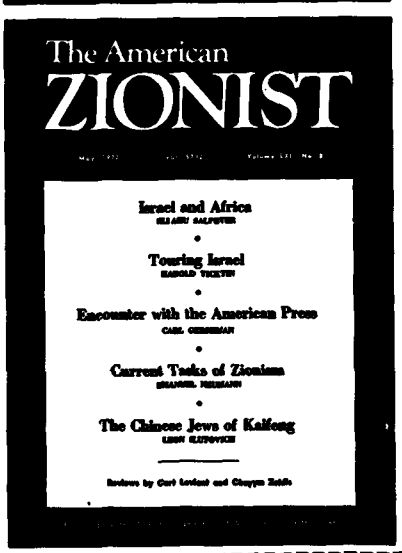

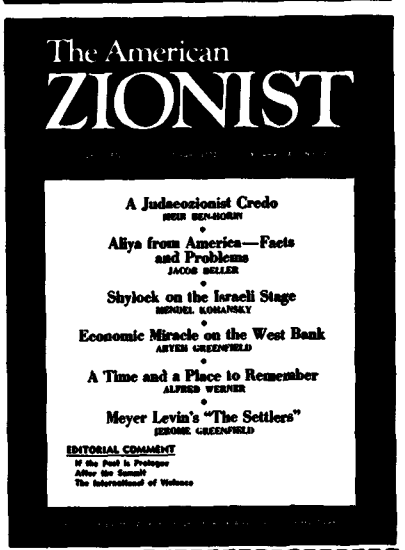

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ing . . . unlike our fixed prayers which are written in clear and simple Hebrew."

In addition to his careful documentation of the development of the *siddur* and of formal prayer in Judaism, Millgram explores other aspects of worship as well: the special rites of initiation—circumcision, redemption of the firstborn, conversion, marriage, and burial—and the symbols and ceremonials associated with worship, such as synagogue architecture, ritual garb and deportment, and music. It is in the area of symbols and ceremonials that Jews historically have shown the greatest readiness to accept the practices of the larger society. For example, the rigorous separation of men and women in the synagogue seems to have derived from Islamic usage; Mishnaic references imply that in an earlier age women had in fact participated in the service, including the public reading of the Torah. The custom of covering the head during worship is interpreted by Millgram as deriving from an aversive Jewish reaction to the opposite Christian practice, although Islamic influence may have been equally important here. Actually, the practice of covering one's head has venerable Jewish roots as well, in the *tallit* (prayer shawl) which in its ancient form, and throughout the Middle Ages, sported a hood and resembled the toga of the Roman priest. According to the Talmud, the covered head is the privilege of the free man in contrast to the bare head of the slave. Nonetheless, covering the head in prayer was a relatively late practice, and became mandatory only under the influence of Islam. This may well be a case where a Jewish attitude was first elevated to law by a daughter religion and then accepted as obligatory by Judaism.

The problem of combining receptivity to the new with the need for some kind of uniformity is well illustrated in the history of synagogue music. Medieval prayer melodies borrowed from the most varied sources, including ancient Jewish cantillation, local folksong, minnesong, and Gregorian chant. At first no restrictions were placed on cantorial borrowing. Millgram quotes Judah the Pious to this effect: "Say your prayer in the melody that is most pleasant and sweet in your eyes. Then you shall pray with proper concentration because the melody will draw your heart after the words that come from your mouth." However, local patterns were eventually established and departures from the accepted modes discouraged. As part of an overall attempt to restore community order and stability following the persecutions that were an aftermath of the Black Death, Rabbi Jacob Mölln of Mainz asserted the absolute validity of local customs and specified that traditional melodies could not be changed at the whim of the individual cantor. (In view of subsequent cantorial excesses, one might wish that the ruling were still being observed.)

No one can predict the future place of the prayer book in Jewish life, or even the future sources of new prayers. One such source (not mentioned by Millgram) might well be contemporary Israeli poetry, some of which shares a remarkable affinity with the great prayers of the *siddur*. It is of interest to note that these prayer-poems are the work not only of Orthodox Jews but also of writers only vaguely traditionalist or even anti-religious in background. When Haim Guri, for example, asks God to "bless the fighting men . . . [for] they are very few . . . and many camps assemble yonder," we are reminded of old prayers like "Watchman of Israel, guard the remnant of Israel. . . ." In the case of an earlier work, by contrast, Yitzhak Lamdan's powerful "O God, Save Masada," the poet goes beyond the limits of traditional prayer, actually "threatening" God with repudiation should He again permit Masada to be destroyed. In this poem Lamdan steps outside of rabbinical Judaism (whose theology informs the *siddur*) and reverts to the attitudes of the biblical Hebrews in their active, ongoing confrontation with God. Lamdan's stance may be taken in a sense to reflect a larger divergence of sensibility—between the Jews of the Diaspora on the one hand, with their attachment to a Judaism shaped decisively by the rabbinic worldview, and the Jews of Israel on the other, who move to a greater extent in a biblical ambience. It is a tension whose ramifications touch upon all aspects of contemporary Jewish experience and one which is certain to have profound consequences for the future. In the meantime, it remains to be seen whether a new "Jerusalem *siddur*" will come into being to reflect the special Israeli attitude, and whether it will prevail over its Diaspora predecessors.

Unsentimental Education

ARRIVING WHERE WE STARTED. By BARBARA PROBST SOLOMON. *Harper & Row. 261 pp. $6.95.*

Reviewed by JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Arriving Where We Started, a title taken from a line in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets,* brings to mind a more current variation on the same theme: "Anywhere you go, there you are!" But sometimes, as Mrs. Solomon's remarkable autobiographical book makes plain, you have to go to find out *who* you are. One of Mrs. Solomon's mottoes when she was a very young girl derived from Chekhov: "Make sure you get to Moscow. Danger is in not arriving." Her Moscow turned out to be Spain (a decade or so after the end of the Spanish Civil War) and Paris (among the colony of young Spanish political exiles). But ultimately her adventure in self-discovery brought her back to New York in a personal reenactment of what is by now an old American story: to find home you first have to leave it.

Mrs. Solomon's girlhood personality, as she describes it, was characterized by a combination of astonishing naiveté and astonishing sophistication. These seem to have derived in equal measure from her education, the progressive schooling of the 1930's and 40's as served up at New York's Dalton School. Attended for the most part by the children of upper-class bohemians and upper-middle-class professionals, places like Dalton, along with providing their students with a

JOSEPH EPSTEIN's *article, "Dr. Coles among the Poor," appeared in our August number.*

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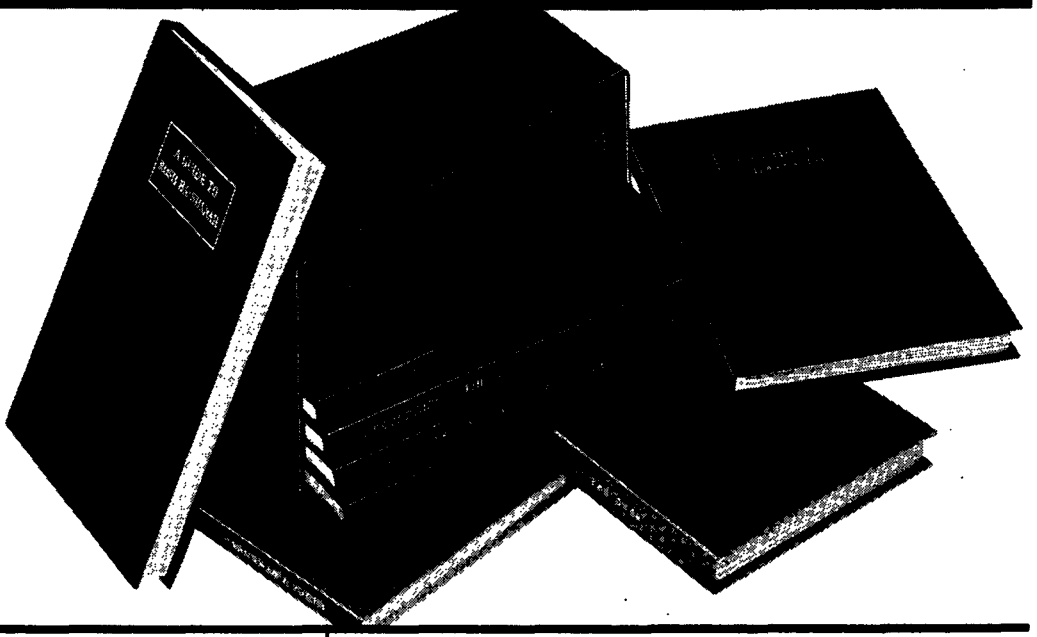
GUIDES TO THE JEWISH FESTIVALS



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better academic education than is generally to be had in the public schools, are at once safer and more dangerous than other schools. In them children grow up protected from their environment but not from themselves; they grow up, somehow, faster, wilder, more at loose ends than children elsewhere. Long before the cant phrase came into existence—and doubtless long after it will have passed into oblivion—students at such progressive private schools were exhorted to do their own thing: to be creative, to cut loose, to recognize no other will or authority in the world but their own. These were the ideals underlying Mrs. Solomon's education, and she offers a telling anecdote about their effect. At fifteen she rose during an assembly and in mock seriousness suggested that she represented the urgent needs of the student body in demanding an additional free week during the school year. She found herself amazed when the faculty congratulated her for her initiative, and the free week was made part of the Dalton system. "Beneath that mocking request for more free time," she notes, "had been another quite different message, so dissembled as not to be heard—the plea for authority."

Dalton put not only the polish on her education but much of the blacking as well, for Mrs. Solomon's home life appears to have been pretty much a void. Her family was extremely wealthy. They were German Jews, which meant, in the years before World War II at least, decidedly more German-American than Jewish. Mrs. Solomon was brought up in a large, rambling apartment in Manhattan's East Sixties; the family summered at an equally stylish estate in Westport, Connecticut. "The rich," says a character in a Huxley novel, "haven't got any neighbors," and neither, growing up, did the young Barbara Probst. Nor did she have anything resembling full-time parents. Her father took breakfast in bed at eleven in the morning, went to his office in the afternoon, and read in his study till the morning hours. Her mother did collages and drew in charcoal in her own room. Father and mother never went out together; husband and wife did not share the same bed. She and her older brother were raised by the family's German maid, who called Barbara "Hannalore," or Little Orphan Annie.

By the time she had attained middle adolescence Mrs. Solomon had "a beaver coat with five stripes" and a Marine boyfriend named Johnny; she had also joined the American Youth for Democracy, an offshoot of the Young Communist League. Brought up during the Depression but because of her family's wealth not of it, coming of age with a longing to be a part of the war but too young to participate in it, she was simultaneously in and out of things, privileged in life but feeling deprived of living. The cult of experience clearly exerted a strong pull on her, perhaps more than normally, since she viewed her mother as "an Edna St. Vincent Millay manqué . . . [who] had never found what she wanted, perhaps never let herself look for it." The daughter would not make the same mistake.

AFTER leaving school, and first spending a drab year living alone in Washington, D.C., and then another dispiriting six months in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Mrs. Solomon, then nineteen years old, finally convinced her parents to allow her to go abroad. Yet how very different her expatriate experience of Europe was to prove from that of other Americans who ventured there around the same time. Unlike the well-heeled members of the so-called "*Paris Review* crowd," who went off to Europe in self-conscious imitation of the American literary and artistic expatriate movement of the 1920's, and unlike, too, those GI's who stayed on in Europe after the war nursing their bruised feelings of dislocation, the young Barbara Probst went to Europe for reasons that were much more free-floating. For her Europe signified adventure and freedom ("Moscow"), and an escape from the emotional drought of home.

As much as character, happenstance shaped her destiny. On the

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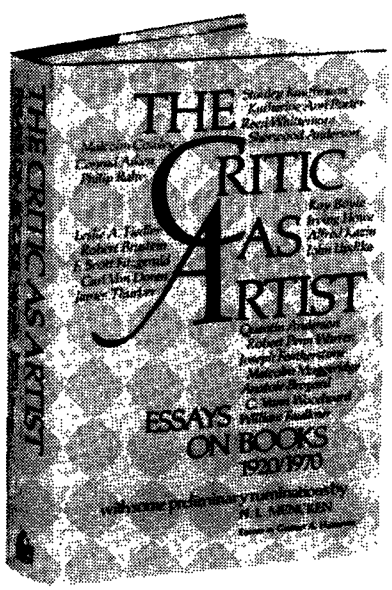

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ship crossing over she met the mother and sister of a young writer, Norman Mailer, who had not yet published his first novel. Then, in Paris, she met Mailer himself who approached her and his sister and "in a somewhat offhand, slightly conspiratorial tone asked the two of us how we would like to uh, sort of, spring a few people from a Franco jail in Spain." The notion was that two young American girls, driving a car with tourist plates, would provide excellent cover for such an escapade. Looking upon the whole thing as something of a "larky" adventure, the two girls agreed—and, what's more, brought it off. After dropping off the escaped prisoners, who made their way on foot across the Pyrenees, the girls crossed the border into France in their car. One of the Spanish border guards, mistaking her address for her name on her passport, marked Mrs. Solomon down on his records as "Miss Westport Connecticut"—which, at that point in her life, was not an entirely outrageous characterization.

But this was soon to change with her immersion in the work and lives of the Spanish exiles with whom she had now thrown in her lot. Suffering the traditional curse of the Left, the Spanish exiles of the late 40's were wildly splintered, and the group she had fallen in with was a part of the Spanish Socialist-Anarchist front, anti-Stalinist and mostly young. In Mrs. Solomon's case, however, it is difficult to say how much such labels really mattered, for she was a leftist of the heart more than of the mind. The reality of the Spanish experience was stimulant enough. She had also entered into a love affair with one of the leaders of the group, Paco, a young man of extraordinary good looks, intellectual depth, courage, and commitment. Off and on they lived together for about four years, and, as Mrs. Solomon freely admits, "What kept me connected, at that time of my life, was my commitment to Paco's commitment to Spanish politics." Yet her commitment was not the less real for all that.

It was through Paco, through the Spanish exile community, through her life in Europe away from what she describes more than once as the "muchness" of America that Mrs. Solomon acquired her special and highly unsentimental education—through the combination of them all that she came to some understanding of herself as an American, and also indirectly as a Jew. She, who had left America of her own volition, was confronted by young Spaniards in Paris who could not return to their country except under penalty of long imprisonment. She met an older exile, a man highly esteemed in Spanish anarchist circles, who told her that America remained for him the country of promise, the only nation that had come into being by a revolution that had not gone completely sour. The effect of the meeting was to give her the sense that she was an American, and that she, too, had her own history.

But her great teacher was Paco, who in the day-to-day living with her made it clear he would have none of her Dalton nonsense. During a minor flare-up, he told her she was conceited and that at nineteen scarcely old enough to consider that she knew much about the world. "Dimly," she writes, "I could begin to see that my untiring effort to be original, which in a peculiar way had been an attempt to please those in charge of my education, was quite the opposite of true rebellion. . . . In convincing me that Tuesday followed Monday, that it was permissible to learn from others, to absorb from the past, in setting firm limits to my aimless behavior, Paco reduced my field of vision to what the French call *la vie à mesure*. I looked at Paco in utter relief; I felt I had been set free."

Under such instruction and with such experience behind her, the strands of Mrs. Solomon's life began coming together in Europe, as they might never have done had she remained in America. She shed her girlishness and became a woman. Her flights were now into, not away from, reality. A drive to postwar Munich, with a side trip to Dachau—one of the most moving segments of the book—shook her once and for all out of the belief that life offered any kind

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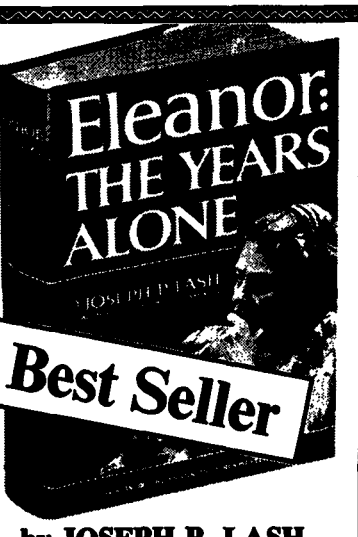

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of security. "Life," as she says toward the end of her memoir, "is a sort of potluck affair, with everyone thinking the next one knows what's going on."

IN THE final section of *Arriving Where We Started* Mrs. Solomon returns to Spain. She is by now the mother of two teen-age daughters and recently widowed—her husband, Harold Solomon, the legal scholar and former protégé of F. O. Matthiessen, having died in his forties of a coronary. It is the late 1960's and the Madrid of her youth is much changed—modern apartment and office buildings line its streets, the noise of discothèques shatters the former silence of its nights—though the Franco regime still turns the screws of repression. The occasion for her return is the death of Paco, the lover of her youth, in an automobile accident in the Middle East. Revisiting Spain she reflects on how few of the dreams of her girlhood had come true. The interior of Spain and the Spain of political exiles had never, as she and Paco ardently wished, come together. The world had become neither a better nor a cleaner place. Yet she had lived and she was alive. "Given the shape of the first half of my life, it now seemed to me perfectly possible that my middle and old age might include more of the same. People rarely change. At least I knew now just *who* was doing the adventuring." The schoolgirl has come of age, and Mrs. Solomon's book is a fascinating record of the process.

Globalists

ONLY ONE EARTH. By BARBARA WARD and RENÉ DUBOS. *Norton. 225 pp. $6.00.*

Reviewed by ROGER STARR

SINCE all those who currently write about man's setting describe it in the singular as *The* Environment, the social movement that may develop from the current interest must ultimately achieve near global unity. What a hardship that is! No one who has tried to force an upriver city to purge its effluents for the benefit primarily of downstream neighbors, will view confidently the possibility of engendering international cooperation for the sake of a generalized improvement in the environment. Each of the prospective cooperators will suffer immediate specific losses and receive benefits which, over the near term at least, will seem vague indeed. This is scarcely a happy augury for partnership.

There are, I guess, some theorists who feel that a nation with vast market purchasing power could impose its environmental standards on its trading partners by threatening not to buy their automobiles, say, unless they met emission standards imposed on the importing nation's own manufacturers. But there are limits, rapidly reached, to this form of economic dictation. The United States may, for example, refuse to manufacture a supersonic plane, and refuse landing permission for the supersonic planes of other countries, but if the Concorde operates successfully from Montreal to European and Asian countries, the economic pressure of American refusal may backfire. If the supersonic plane is a significant menace to air quality, its ban must ultimately depend on international agreement, at least among those nations likely to be involved in its use.

Only One Earth addresses itself to the development of international agreement in the form of a United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Funded by the World Bank and the Ford Foundation and commented on, in manuscript, by seventy experts from different nations, the volume was prepared as a background document for the conference recently held in Stockholm. Because its status is officially unofficial, its two writers did not need to fear that their words would commit any government to policies to which it might object. In fact, the book stands so very far in the background that it does not suggest committing any nation to any political program whatsoever. The writers combine authentic scientific credentials with a long list of previous publications, and are able to render a lucid account of man's recent impact on the earth. They stress several specific types of human activity: the disposal of the sewage and solid waste produced by unprecedented urban populations; the generation of electric power in quantities that have been growing exponentially; the raising of agricultural production to new peaks by the use of fertilizers, insecticides, and irrigation; and the attainment of unprecedented personal mobility by the use of vast amounts of petrochemicals for the direct benefit of a rather small part of the total world population.

The litany of foreboding engendered by these processes has now become as familiar as a singing commercial. Barbara Ward and René Dubos add a few new jingles which are not without interest. They present some unfamiliar background information on the economics of the Industrial Revolution and the impulses which quickened it; they tell us about the uranium atom in some refreshingly simple detail; they acquaint us with the methods of the Ruhr *Genossenschaften,* a group of quasi-governmental agencies which impose water-effluent standards on industrial and municipal water users and build and operate purification plants paid for by user charges; and they provide us with some interesting detail on the Green Revolution in the production of cereal crops in the backward (developing) countries.

This information, in readily assimilable form, tells us once again that all of the species on earth derive their sustenance from a finite, though large, stock of raw material which can neither be added to nor subtracted from. If the capital stock is unwisely manipulated, or reduced to a form which resists useful regeneration, earth's living organisms will *sooner* or *later* find themselves pinched of their necessities. Presumably, the first task to which governmental representatives will turn their attention is the definition of those two words: *sooner* and *later*. But here we find something of a contradiction. For

ROGER STARR *is executive director of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of New York, Inc.*

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while the representatives of the industrialized countries wonder how soon the pinch will begin in earnest (very soon, say our authors), the governments of non-industrialized countries are interested in quite a different question of soonness. They want to know how soon their people will be able to extract an adequate standard of living from the earth's resources.

The authors have undertaken the attempt to reconcile these two different—and in my view irreconcilable—questions. Anything which makes production more expensive in the industrialized countries cramps their ability to export credit and capital goods to the non-industrialized countries. The authors charge that the industrialized countries fail to take accurate account of the diseconomies of industrialization, including the wastage of natural assets and the loss of common amenity. This allegation has also won widespread favor lately among editorialists who inveigh against the use of a statistical Gross National Product as a measure of the level of economic activity within an economic system. They argue that a Net National Product, taking into account the wastage of assets and amenities, would be a more useful calculation; and so it might, for some purposes, as a Rorschach Test may be more useful than a bathroom scale, for some purposes. If, however, the new system would require the wastage in assets and amenities to be made good, the labor and materials that will be used in the effort must be found somewhere in the economy, and a Gross National Product measure is very helpful in determining where and how they can be found. Not only will someone have to pay for the added effort required to "restore" the environment, but those directly and indirectly employed in making the effort will either reduce the output of other goods and services, or else they will augment the total labor force by having been drawn from the ranks of the jobless and the underemployed. Surely, under the money-wage system which the industrialized nations have developed, this added activity will stimulate a multiplier effect, increasing the de-

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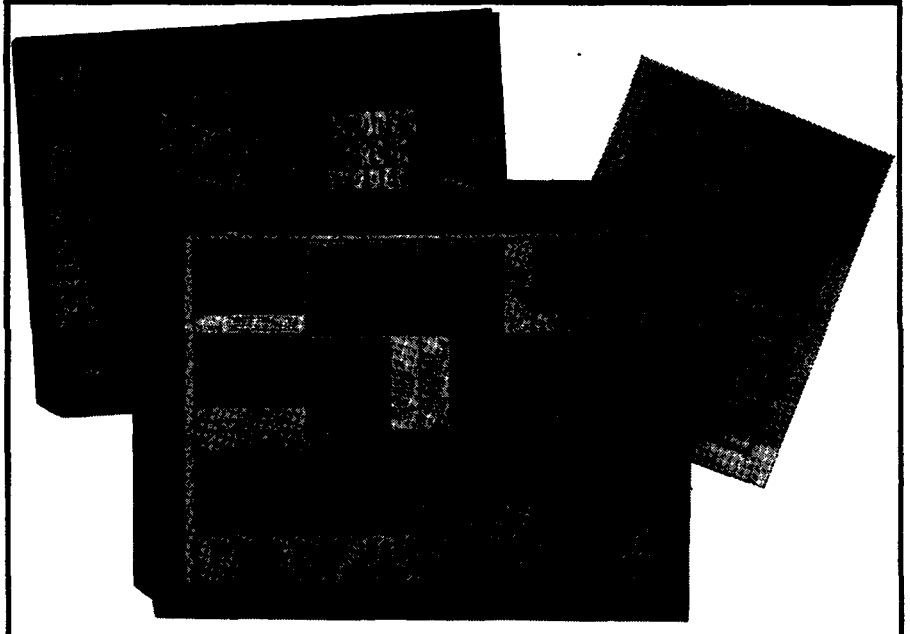

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mand for consumer goods and services, in further competition with the goods and services which might be useful in speeding the industrializing pace of the underdeveloped countries.

It also seems certain that no non-industrial country could afford a higher standard of living for its people unless it were willing to keep its books of account in the same way which the authors now criticize the industrial states for having kept theirs. There could be no accumulation of capital for development if every disturbance of the stock assets and amenities were set down as a liability on the balance sheet and a reserve established for making it good.

Since the earth is, as they tell us in their title, Only One, the authors should ultimately make their choice between devoting the economic energy of the developed world primarily to the reconstitution of its own environment, or devoting it to the industrial development of the underdeveloped world. Some, surely, will argue that enough can be found for all; but this, if true under any circumstances, is true only if the consumers of the industrialized world can be prevented (how?) from demanding the panoply of consumer products whose manufacture and enjoyment (outboard motors, skidoos, and air-conditioners seem to be prime examples) make extravagant use of the stock of natural resources. Without politically dubious controls, the economic overheating would consume the industrial capacity and human energy which might otherwise be used to produce the capital goods needed in the developing world.

A tiny hint of the implicit ambiguity is to be found in the discussion of urban settlement in the book. The cities of the developed world are criticized for their inhumane contours and their possibly devastating effect on human character and personality. Governmental representatives are told, in short, that the developed nations should devote vast resources to the reconstruction of existing cities, or their replacement by a new form of conurbation. But a passing reference to the developing world lists just such activity—"beautifying capital cities"—as an example of capital *mis*use. Can the selfsame activity possibly be blessed in the developed world and damned in the underdeveloped world? If the earth is truly one, it can much less well afford the vast investments required to rebuild the major cities of the West than it can the relatively modest cost of beautifying the capital city of an underdeveloped country, which may be the one real symbol of national unity and purpose.

THE reader of *Only One World*, whether or not he has governmental responsibilities, must come away from the book with the feeling that—even accepting a strategic framework for either the developed or the underdeveloped world—the practical decisions that must be made to protect natural assets and amenities are difficult and unclear. Power needs will continue to grow, yet it is impossible to pick with certainty, given the present state of technology, the types of generating systems that will cause the smallest burden on the environment. Populations will continue to grow, yet modern technology provides no universally acceptable answer as to how their wastes can be disposed of with the least damage, although our authors refer to various recycling schemes which have been of some local usefulness. The present form of urban settlement is incapable of providing satisfactory homes for a greatly enlarged population, but there is not even agreement among planners as to the least baneful type of future settlement. The list of technical decisions still to be made is practically endless.

The difficulty in devising practical answers has produced a paradoxical economic result. Instead of an overheating, the environmental movement has tended so far to produce a mild economic stagnation. The National Environmental Policy Act, adopted in the United States in 1969, has already resulted in a diminution of economic activity, and a loss of income: airfields and roads have not been built, power plants have not been built, recreational facilities and housing developments have not been built. The scale of these non-acts has so far been too small to attract notice outside of the affected industries, labor unions, and the residents of nearby towns and villages. Those adversely affected—in the short run at least—find that emphasis on the saving of the natural environment and its riches seems often to ignore those who must work to live. It is not clear how long the affected parties will accept economic hardship in order to preserve something for future generations, but the record on such clearcut international conservation problems as the whale and the oceanic salmon fishery offers few grounds for optimism on this score.

HERE, of course, the authors part company with the record. Both seem hopeful, though for two different reasons which I suspect can be traced to the differences between them as individuals. Barbara Ward, the political economist, I would guess to be responsible for those passages which suggest that "we," by which she means, I take it, that great rational animal, mankind, will do the right thing when "we" know it to be right. I would ascribe to Dr. Dubos the suggestion that when Man, the perpendicular ape, descries the true balance of ecology, he will imitate it in his own political and social life. I would hate to head for either of these supports in a maelstrom. If the physical environment of the developed world is deteriorating in fact as fast and as inevitably as we are told in this book, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment will be able to do precious little about it. This international political organization was established primarily to avoid war and the threat of war; after twenty-eight years, the authors point out, armaments continue to absorb more human and natural energy than would be needed to achieve many of the environmental goals set forth in their book. If the clear wastefulness of war has failed to deter the armaments race, I cannot see how the less obvious waste of the internal combustion engine will bring on a rational (or even a simian) rejection.

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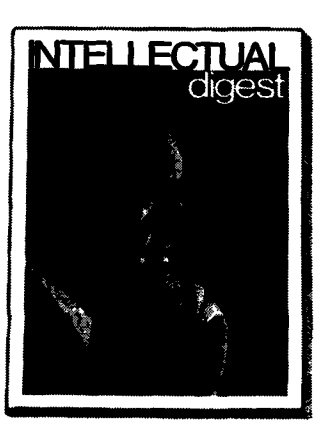

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Two Worlds

MY NAME IS ASHER LEV. By CHAIM POTOK. *Knopf. 369 pp. $7.95.*

Reviewed by DAVID STERN

THE protagonists of Chaim Potok's novels—*The Chosen, The Promise,* and now *My Name is Asher Lev*—follow a common career; in the course of the narrative they are seen moving slowly and with agonizing reluctance out of, and away from, the religious community in which they were born and brought up (a highly sentimentalized version of Brooklyn's Williamsburgh or Crown Heights section twenty years ago) and into secular society. Yet for all the suffering they undergo in this process, and despite the relentless psychological motion through which Potok pushes and pulls them, his characters display no real understanding of the dilemma which they have been chosen to exemplify, which is nothing short of the dilemma of modern religious Judaism itself.

Historically, the Orthodox-Jewish community, insular by choice and by dint of outside pressure, has gone to extreme lengths in its rejection of the secular, and those Jews who have attempted to lead both religious and secular lives have often fallen prey to a real confusion of identity, a kind of metaphorical schizophrenia. Potok's heroes, however, move *from the religious to the secular* under the spell of an aimless, even a gratuitous, inevitability. In fact his novels *assume* the impossibility of existing in both the religious and the secular spheres—an assumption whose net effect amounts in the end to a kind of apology for assimilationism. The schizophrenic trap of living a double life and of speaking in two, often exclusive, languages—the subject of all of Potok's novels—is precisely what he has been most unsuccessful either in depicting or in attempting to resolve.

DAVID STERN, *a recent graduate of Columbia College, is the recipient of the 1972-73 Henry Evans Fellowship from Columbia University.*

In *My Name Is Asher Lev,* Potok deals with one very special aspect of this dilemma. Asher Lev is a uniquely talented artist, born to a Hasidic family otherwise distinguished not only for its piety and scholarship but for service to the *rebbe* and to the community. As a child, dabbling in crayons and watercolors, Asher Lev is treated with condescension and indulgence; he is considered a mild curiosity. When, however, he commits himself unequivocally as a young adult to the traditions of Western art and begins to paint nudes and crucifixions (as though nudes and crucifixions were the only subject matter of Western art), his family and community turn upon him with the violence and hatred reserved only for representatives of the *sitra achra,* literally *the other side,* a kabbalistic euphemism for the satanic and the diabolic.

The specific issue that Potok raises here—the status of art and artists within the traditional Jewish community—is symptomatic of the larger problem raised by Judaism's attitude toward the creative arts in general. While the Orthodox-Jewish community has given birth to great painters, musicians, and writers, it has not encouraged, nurtured, or sustained them in their achievement, and, in the case of representational art especially, it has been downright hostile to their calling. The biblical prohibition against the fashioning of idols ("Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold") was traditionally interpreted to forbid all three-dimensional, sculptured representations of the human body; as for painting, although not explicitly forbidden, it came to be viewed, because of its origins, as essentially the heritage and property of pagan (Greek and Roman) and Christian culture—unsuitable by definition for the Jew.

Behind such an attitude lies a basic philosophical antagonism between *halacha* (Jewish law) and art. Whereas the one, the legal embodiment of revealed truth, forms the very basis of social and religious order, the other, as the expression *par excellence* of the individual voice and the private vision, represents an actual or potential threat to all communal values. On this point, oddly enough, Orthodox Judaism sees eye to eye with Plato, and whenever the community has seen fit, or been compelled, to permit artistic expression in its midst, it has proceeded more or less along the lines suggested in the *Republic*: tolerating and indulging that which clearly lies within the boundaries of the Law or, at the least, does not subvert the religious interests of the community; rigorously forbidding everything that refuses to yield to the needs of didacticism. The case has never been one of overt or official censorship, but of a subtle and persistent pressure which has discouraged the pursuit of artistic talent and attempted to channel that energy into more conventional disciplines. Yet whatever form it has taken, the hostility fostered by *halacha* has contributed to a common view of the artist as heretical or, at the least, immoral.

Children are, of course, most susceptible to prejudices of this kind. In the baseball game with which his first novel, *The Chosen,* begins, Potok captured very well the zeal and inventiveness with which children turn play into a ritualization of their parents' animosities. Similarly, the most successful passages in *Asher Lev* occur when the child artist is caught in class drawing the face of the *rebbe* on the page of a Bible. He is taunted by his classmates as "the destroyer of Torah," and "*goy* Lev"; then one day he discovers a mildly scatological poem inserted between the pages of his Talmud text. In revenge, Asher copies a detail from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* that depicts "a man being pulled headlong into hell by serpentine demons"; substituting the face of an especially obnoxious classmate for that of the man, he inserts the copy into the classmate's Talmud:

> He said nothing to me about the drawings. But he began to avoid me. His thin face would fill with dread whenever he caught me looking at him. I had the feeling he regarded me now as evil and malevolent, as a demonic and

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contaminating spawn of the Other Side.

Even should he wish to remain within his community, Asher Lev stands beyond its circle if not outside God's Creation as well.

Exactly what there is for him on the "other side," however, is hard to say. As a portrait of the artist and a study of his growth and maturing, *Asher Lev* is without distinction. We are constantly told of Asher Lev's prodigious talent, and of the extent to which he suffers for his art, but from Potok's banal and sentimental descriptions of his painting, Asher Lev sounds dreadfully untalented. Moreover, his conflict with his father, which provides the impetus to his creative energies and is the dramatic focus of the novel, is treated in a heavy-handed and even careless way. Thus, when Asher Lev finally cuts off his side-curls, a gesture rich in psychological suggestiveness precisely because it is at once an assertion of self and an act of self-castration, Potok treats the incident merely as an indication of Asher Lev's movement from one social ambience to another.

My Name Is Asher Lev concludes with the description of a rather horrendous painting, *The Brooklyn Crucifixion*—a portrait of the artist's mother tied to the Venetian blinds of her front window as she waits for her husband and son to return—which nevertheless poses an overwhelming question: the possibility, or viability, of an art authentically Jewish. The artist committed to remaining within Judaism in a more than peripheral way, who makes his concern the creation of a work that will stand firmly within Jewish tradition, faces the necessity of working in genres whose origins and structures are all secular. The paradox implicit here may itself begin to suggest an aesthetics rooted in the same "schizophrenia" characteristic of Jewish existence within secular society. Chaim Potok no doubt would wish to be understood as working in the direction of such an aesthetic, but he has yet to write a novel whose imaginative richness and narrative strength would begin to approach the standard to which he aspires.

Letting Go

PSYCHOPATHS. By ALAN HARRINGTON. *Simon & Schuster. 288 pp. $7.95.*

Reviewed by RICHARD SCHICKEL

ALONG with a lot of people I know, I've been observing an increase in the amount of apparently psychopathic behavior in the street, at work, in meetings, and, for that matter, behind the wheels of New York taxicabs. Moreover, when one applies a garden-variety dictionary definition of psychopathy—"a disorder . . . in which reality is usually clearly perceived except for an individual's social and moral obligations and which often seeks immediate personal gratification in criminal acts. . . ."—to almost any newspaper, newsmagazine, or TV news program, one might quickly conclude that something like half the behavior they report on is psychopathic. Here I am speaking not merely about such criminal spectaculars as the career of the Boston Strangler or of Charles Manson, but about phenomena like Clifford Irving and Bernard Cornfeld as well as about routine, nearly anonymous criminal activities—muggings, police corruption, the bribing of building inspectors and IRS agents—those short, back-page items that so enliven one's efforts to keep abreast of current affairs. Indeed, I don't believe it is evidence of paranoia to suggest that a good deal of legitimate (or at least widely indulged and legally non-actionable) endeavor in our society has psychopathic overtones.

In the light of all this, Alan Harrington's new book, *Psychopaths,* strikes me as appearing at a singularly opportune moment. I for one would welcome a serious attempt to assess, in some non-impressionistic way, the actual amount of psychopathic behavior in the United States today; to provide some serious analysis of the reasons for its apparent increase; and, perhaps, to suggest some remedies or at least some method of living with it. After all, no one has dealt intelligently with psychopathy, in a form the common reader can readily apprehend, since Norman Mailer took up the matter in his famous essay on the hipster, "The White Negro," in 1957.

Unfortunately, Harrington has muffed his chance. His opening chapters are useful as a kind of field guide, bringing together valuable material from Robert Lindner, the *Rebel without a Cause* man; William Krasner and Hervey Cleckley, clinicians who have written wisely on the subject; Ortega y Gasset, whose remarks on mass man are apposite; and, of course, a certain amount of Mailer. The bulk of the book, though, consists of case studies gathered from friends and from Harrington's own observations, some of them intriguing enough, but quite a fair number of them being accounts not of psychopathic behavior but of other forms of maladjustment that seem to me well within the range of routine neurotic patterns. He concludes with a brief chapter proposing (a) that courses in how to cope with psychopathic behavior be taught in the schools, "*like a second language*" (Harrington's italics) so that straights can learn to cope with the "irreversible" rise of a great population of causeless rebels; and (b) that a national drug-church be established, the "Church of Rebirth by Any Means," where "psychopaths and nonpsychopaths lie down together, and by sharing the death-rebirth experience [which Harrington himself has known on psychedelics] learn to live with one another."

I WILL return to these remarkable prescriptions later, but first I would like to go back to Mailer's essay, a piece of work to which Harrington's book is but the logical (or should I say illogical?) extension. (Indeed, it may be the signal virtue of *Psychopaths* that it encourages a re-reading of "The White Negro.") Mailer at least made an attempt to estimate the number of Americans "who are more or less psychopathic" (a "modest" ten million), and he

RICHARD SCHICKEL, Life *magazine's regular movie critic, is currently at work on a book about D. W. Griffith.*

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made what still seems to me an accurate attempt to locate the areas where they tend to congregate, which is in the arts and communications (including politics)—areas where their stylistic influence is likely to be felt in disproportion to their numbers. This may seem a small matter, but Harrington gives the impression they are everywhere, all around us, and perhaps by this time, a majority. This leads to a certain hysteria in his tone, and, of course, justifies the rather desperately visionary quality of his recommendations for solving the social problem their presence creates.

I DON'T mean to argue that the number of psychopaths is any smaller than it was—on the contrary, Mailer's predictions of a growth in the psychopathic manner seem more accurate than ever today—but anyone writing on the subject should be careful to distinguish psychopathy from mere eccentricity, and this Harrington does not sufficiently do. He is even less helpful on the question of the connection between psychopathic behavior and the psychopathic style—just where Mailer is especially illuminating. Mailer saw hipsterism as an outgrowth of the urban black style, in turn a response to the fact that blacks could not afford "the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so . . . kept for their survival the art of the primitive . . . lived in the enormous present." Obviously this style would not come naturally to "The White Negro." To achieve the black man's cool he had, more or less consciously, to "encourage the psychopath in [himself] to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present . . . which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where man must go until he is beat, where he must gamble with all his energies through all those small or large crises of courage and unforeseen situations which beset his day, where he must be with it or doomed not to swing." And why? Because he understands that the psychopath—the true psychopath—may be "the perverted and dangerous front-runner of a new kind of personality which could become the central expression of human nature before the 20th century is over . . . better adapted to dominate those mutually contradictory inhibitions upon violence and love which civilization has exacted of us. . . ."

Now it is obvious that Mailer was suggesting a delicate and dangerous course. Writing in the Eisenhower decade, in the time of *The Lonely Crowd* and *The Organization Man*, he observed in the rise of the hipster an alternative to conformity and the couch, and he was suggesting to intellectuals, artists, and others who wished to remain outside what then appeared to be a monolithic middle-class culture, a conscious embrace of elements in the psychopathic style. But to be "a philosophical psychopath," as Mailer phrased it, was not to become a clinical psychopath. Mostly he seemed to be proposing abandonment of the typical middle-class citizen's thralldom both to the future—in the form of careerist caution—and to the past—all those outworn customs and manners that inhibited a creative response to "the enormous present." Given the temper of the 1950's, hipsterism seemed a worthwhile gamble, even for a reader like myself who was not prepared personally to embrace the style.

WHAT Mailer could not have foreseen, what no one could, was that hipsterism—with its psychopathic overtones—would become a mass movement *so quickly*, thereby creating the mess that Harrington (like the rest of us) would like to untangle. How much of the seemingly psychopathic behavior he reports, and the rest of us observe, is of Mailer's "philosophical" sort, how much is clinical, how much merely stylistic? My own guess is that the number of philosophical psychopaths has been stable, that there has been some slight, and probably inevitable, rise in the clinical variety, but that by far the largest increase has been in those who merely adopt the outer trappings of psychopathy. About the philosophical variety there is not much to say. They are, as Mailer indicated, a subgroup among the much broader group of existentialists, but they have not for some time exercised the kind of obvious influence on literature or the other arts that their predecessors, the Beats, did for a few years in 50's. One is not aware, for example, of any major line of thought, formally expressed, descending from Mailer's essay, except, of course, in his own personal history.

On the other hand, the rise in clinical psychopathy, or perhaps more properly of overt behavior that brings the psychopath to the attention of the authorities as well as the rest of us, is clear. So is a really astonishing rise in behavior that looks like psychopathy and which Harrington is by no means alone in identifying as the genuine article. It is to his credit, I think, that he has mostly avoided the glib, common explanations for this phenomenon. He does not, for instance, attribute the prevalence of the psychopathic style to what the New Left likes to imagine as the pre-fascist condition of our institutions, though there are passages in Mailer himself that he could have employed to support that contention. Nor does he suggest, as a primitive right-winger might, that the fault lies with Dr. Spock, permissiveness, and progressive education, though it would not be difficult to do something superficially persuasive along those lines. Still, there are some generalizations about the way a lot of us have taken to living in the last couple of decades that seem worth mentioning—and which Harrington barely touches upon—if we are going to come to grips with the apparent increase in both real and stylistic psychopathy.

Take the issue of mobility. The automobile, the jet, bear us quickly away from the scene of any and all crimes—out of sight, out of mind. We might wonder, for example, if the psychopathic murderers apostrophized by Truman Capote in *In Cold Blood* would ever have conceived the murder of the Clutter family, much less have executed it, if it had not been so easy to put distance between themselves and their conveniently unknown victims.

Similarly, it is clear that the ul-

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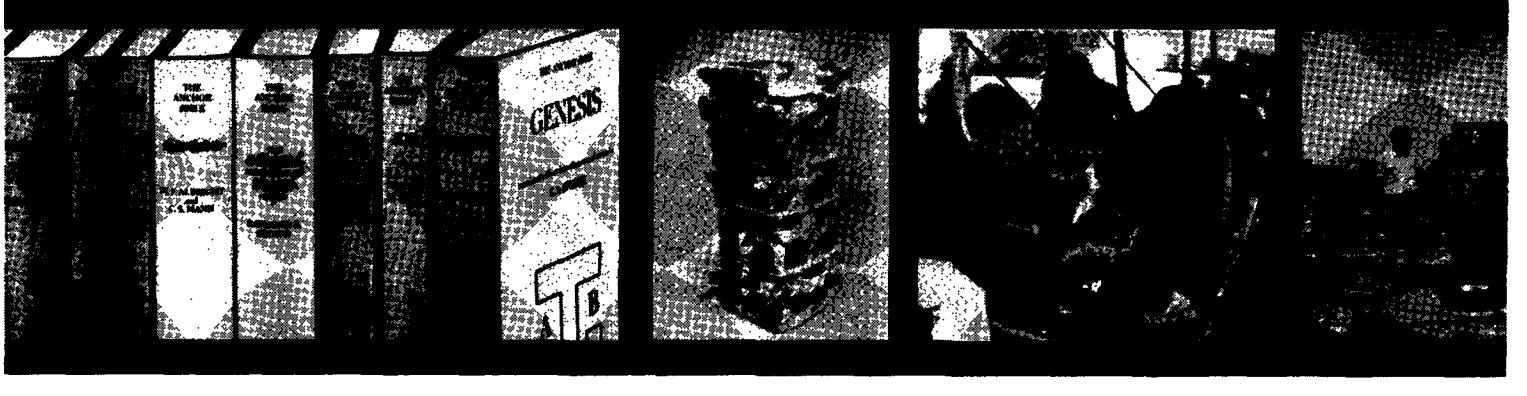

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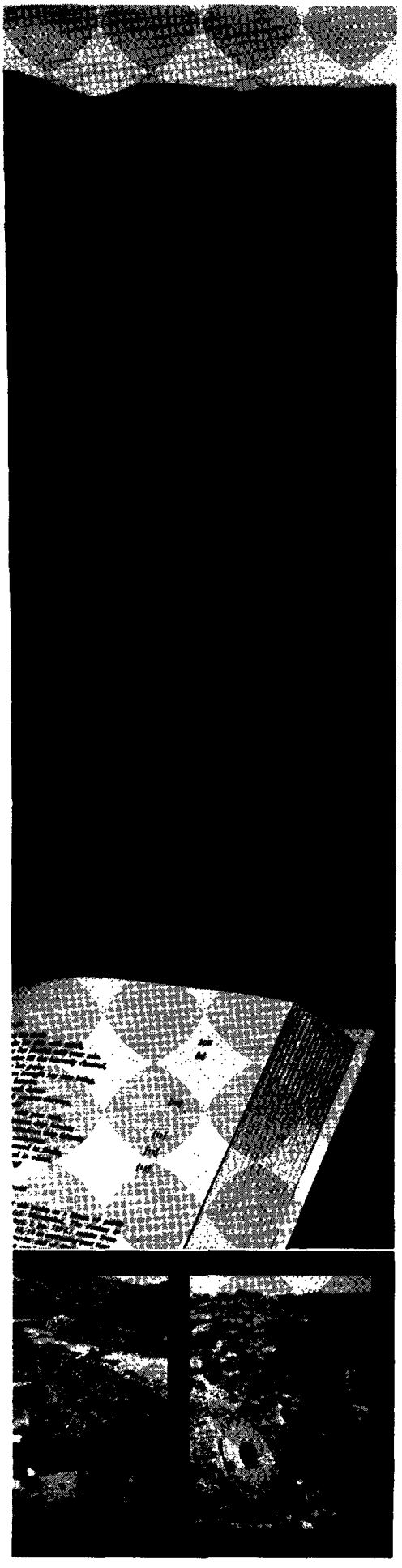

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timate consequence—death, that is—of much psychopathic behavior has been swept out of sight, sanitized. I'm not referring to images of death, which as we all know have grown increasingly insistent, gory, "realistic," in the movies and in the nightly televised news films from Vietnam. I'm referring rather to actual confrontation with a human being undergoing the final agony—a body in the room with us, dying. As Mr. Harrington pointed out in an earlier, better book, *The Immortalist*, science has so increased our life span that many of us can avoid lively imaginative confrontations with death until we are middle-aged. Moreover, death does not take place, anymore, within the normal context of our lives: our loved ones generally pass out of the world in institutions, watched over by strangers, technicians, and their passage is eased by pain-killers. Even suicide, as A. Alvarez has recently observed, now most commonly takes the form of super-sedation.

Paradoxically, one consequence of all this is the pornographic quality that has crept into artistic treatments of death, in films in particular—the incessant, lascivious probing and prying that seems to betray a wish, similar to that which operates in sexual pornography, to capture the essence of a great mystery by recording every last manifestation of it as it occurs. More important, however, is their effect on the psychopath. The obsessive reiteration of death images, besides stimulating curiosity of a fatal kind, undoubtedly renders the act itself less horrendous, less real. One can easily imagine a psychopath walking away from murder with the comment that it was just like the movies after all. Something not dissimilar is surely operable to some degree in other crimes as well—political assassination and skyjacking come to mind most readily.

ALL psychopathic crimes are designed to win attention: instant, effortless celebrity is, in fact, usually the reward the criminal seeks, no matter what he says his motives are. (Arthur Bremer, the would-be assassin of George Wallace, made this clear at his trial when he complained to reporters about the difficulties of being a "star": "It's lonely at the top," he added, in unconscious parody of the fan-magazine style.) The media then become the psychopath's accomplice. It is not unknown, indeed, for an enterprising reporter to ring up a psychopath while he is in the midst of his crime—as Meyer Berger did with a sniper firing from an apartment window in New Jersey a couple of decades ago—or for a radio or television network to patch in to the frequency on which a skyjacker is communicating with an airport control tower.

For the most part—understandably—the media have carefully avoided facing the fact that they are themselves the major source of the psychopath's gratification, not to mention the "educational" function they perform in reporting on crimes in such exquisite detail as to provide instruction manuals, so to speak, for psychopaths-in-training. A big crime tends to draw forth three sorts of journalistic response. Usually we can count on something about "the climate of violence" in which we now live; the press, if it's mentioned at all, is seen merely as a neutral transmission system, not an active collaborator, in the creation of that climate. Occasionally a commentator will remark on the way movies and television shows rub the psychopathic nervous system raw. We are also likely to find psychiatrists offering their opinions and services on the talk-shows, though (as Harrington notes) the psychopath is notoriously resistant to psychiatric ministrations. And, of course, there are those gaseous editorials and think pieces about the nation's alleged historical propensity for violence, pieces which invite all of us—as well as our frontier ancestors—to join in feeling guilty.

WHAT to do about all this? Perhaps nothing. It is possible that Harrington is correct in saying that so many of us are already so far gone in the psychopathic style that the rest of us can only hope to make some kind of bad peace. Yet however hysterical a particularly nasty bit of psychopathy may temporarily make us feel, it does seem that he has exaggerated the threat. And even if he hasn't, his prescriptions will hardly help the situation. No doubt we need to be more aware of the psychopathic roots of a lot of behavior that is now tolerated or even encouraged. But teaching the psychopathic style as "a second language" in some formal way would only have the effect of normalizing it even further. The same, of course, applies to Harrington's drug churches, which anyway strike me as the kind of wild notion that comes to social critics straining for a solution to the seemingly insoluble problem they've just devoted a book to identifying.

There is, it seems to me, another and simpler solution. A party of reason still functions in the land, and it still probably represents a majority. Most members of the press—including television—regard themselves as members of that party. Although I don't mean to suggest that they institute any kind of official censorship, I do mean to suggest that they exercise self-discipline. A news editor can, in some degree, play down stories about psychotic behavior. He can certainly hedge accounts of psychopathic crimes by obtaining better-informed quotations from the inevitable psychiatrists; he can even instruct reporters in more sophisticated techniques for handling such material. Talk-show bookers and hosts might cease suffering fools so readily and gladly. In short, we might, in a hundred ways, encourage people to cease "letting it all hang out," and begin to encourage the business of tucking it all back in.

The voluntary imposition of standards of public decorum and debate would constitute a refreshing novelty in our mass culture. Sanity is always, in one degree or another, an act of will, insanity an act of letting go. The main point is to create a climate in which the former is a little bit easier, the latter a little bit harder to do. Issues like those posed by the psychopathic presence in a society are neither wholly medical nor wholly social and political. They are simply facts of life that, finally, can be dealt with only by the informed heart, in private, daily, practice.

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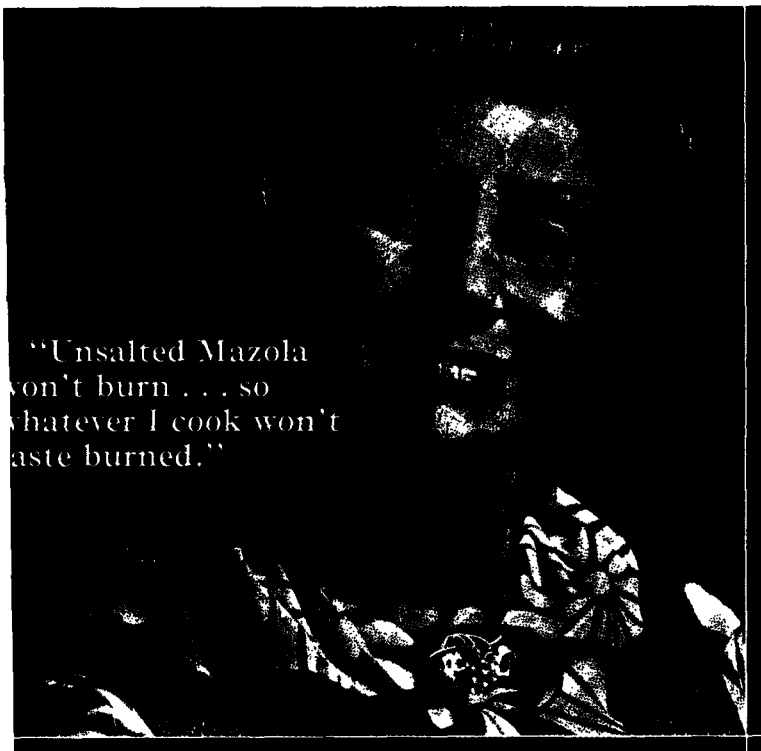

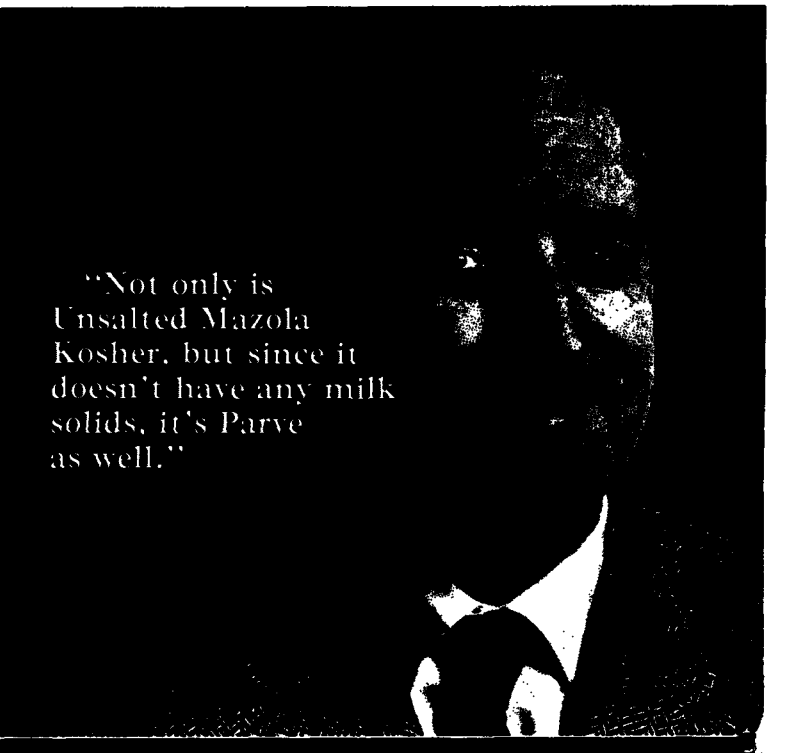

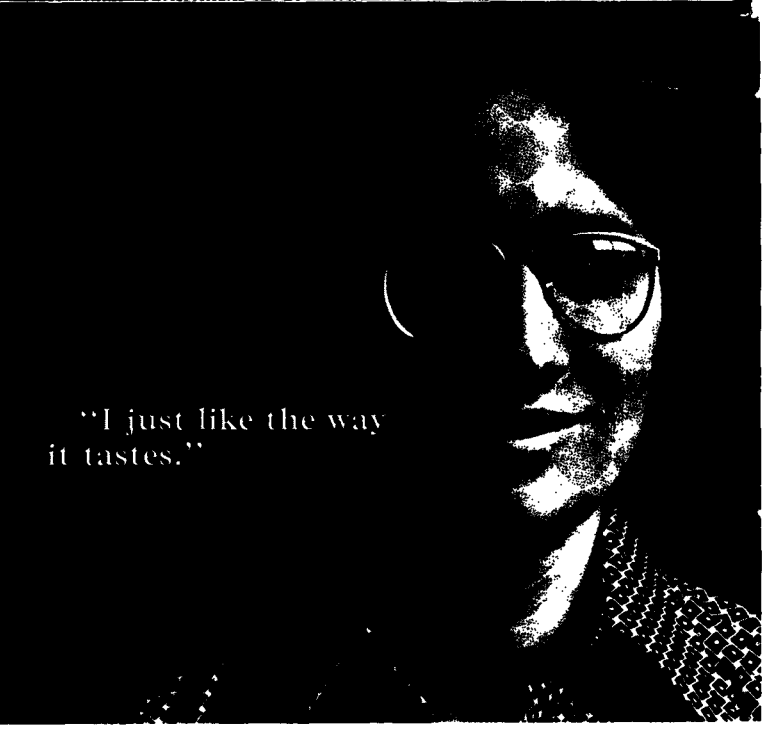

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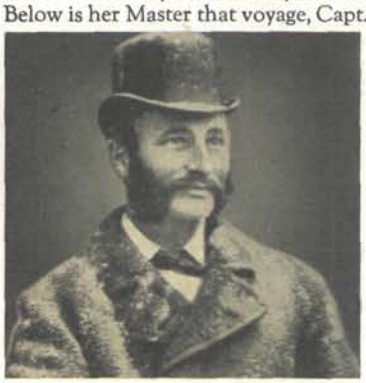

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